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Cong will conduct Caste census if voted to power

Rahul assures filling 30 lakh central government vacancies

BASTAR, 13 APRIL

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said if his party is voted to power at the Centre, it will immediately conduct a caste census in the country.

Addressing an election rally at Bastar village Chhattisgarh's Bastar district, he described the upcoming Lok Sabha elections as a fight between two ideologies involving those seeking to protect the Constitution and those out to destroy it.

He also attacked the Narendra Modi-led government and said President Droupadi Murmu was prevented from attending the consecration of Ram temple in Ayodhya as she is a tribal, and it reflects BJP's mentality.

The rally was held in support of Congress' candidate from Scheduled Tribe-reserved Bastar Lok Sabha seat Kawasi Lakhma. "Modi ji has been trying to change the word 'adivasi'. We call you (tribals) adivasi, but they use the term 'vanvasi'. There is a huge difference between vanvasi and adivasi terms'!," he said.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during a public meeting ahead of Lok Sabha elections, in Bastar district on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

The word 'adivasi' has a deep meaning. The word expresses your rights on jal, jungle, zameen (water, forest, land), while vanvasi means those who live in the jungle, he said. The Congress leader said BJP and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) have been attacking religion, ideology and history of tribals.

BJP has been giving your lands to billionaires, he added.

"The President of India was prevented from attending the consecration ceremony of Ram temple in Ayodhya because she is a tribal. Modiji gave this message to the country and this is their thinking" he said. Highlighting the poll promise of Congress, Gandhi said, We will conduct a caste census immediately after coming to power.

"We will undertake recruitment to 30 lakh vacant government posts, start apprenticeships for youth if voted to power," he added.

Gandhi also claimed that under Modi's rule, 22 businessmen accumulated wealth equal to that of 70 crore Indians. *—PTI*

People attend a public meeting of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi ahead of Lok Sabha elections Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

Farmers' loans will be waived, says Rahul Gandhi

BHANDARA, 13 APRIL

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said loans of farmers will be waived if his party comes to power at the Centre.

Addressing a rally in Sakoli in Maharashtra's Bhandara district, he said the main issues plaguing the people of the country were unemployment and inflation, though these were ignored by the media.

"Loans of farmers will be waived if Congress comes to power. People are distressed due to unemployment and inflation. The situation is such that people earning just thousands and those making crores are paying the same GST," he said while attacking NDA. Gandhi said his party would conduct a caste census after attaining power since it is important for the future of the country. Slamming the Centre's Agnipath programme, in which soldiers called 'Agniveers' are recruited for four years, Gandhi said it would be scrapped since "the Army was not in its favour".

Attacking Modi, he said the Prime Minister, who calls himself an OBC, must tell the country what he has done for the segment in his 10-year rule. The Union government is working for a few industrialists, while common people are getting nothing, he claimed.

"Just 22 persons have wealth equivalent to that held by 50 per cent of the country's population. But Modi only keeps talking about religion and tries to create enmity among castes and communities," Gandhi alleged.

He claimed the share prices of firms owned by Gautam Adani had skyrocketed during the 10-year rule of Modi, with the billionaire now having stakes in every sphere from airports to ports to roads, bridges, coal mines and power plants. *—PTI*

E-GAMMING INDUSTRY

Gaming industry doesn't require regulation, says PM

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

The gaming industry does not require any regulation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday while asserting that it must remain free and only then it will boom.

In a free-wheeling interaction with top Indian online gamers on a host of issues about the future as well as the challenges before the e-gaming industry, the prime minister posed questions to the gamers while trying his hands at some of the games.

When a gamer Naman Mathur asked Modi if there was any need for regulations for the gaming sector, he said regulate would not be the right word because it is the government's nature to intervene.

"My attempt is to uplift the nation to a level that by 2047 the government is out of the lives of middle-class families in particular. Our life is stuck in paperwork. It is the poor who need the government, the government should be there with them in difficult times," Modi said.

Another gamer Animesh Agarwal said the government should recognise esports and gaming as a mainstream sport.

"It is a skill-based gaming and does not involve gambling. Once it is established and understood by all government bodies, including those involved in financial transactions, it will be really beneficial. As you said, the industry does not need a regulation. We should let it grow freely. With a little push, the industry will be ready," he told the Prime Minister.

To this, Modi replied, "It (esports and gaming) does not require any regulation. It must remain free, only then it will boom."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi poses for a group photo during an interaction with some of the top Indian gamers **PHOTO: ANI**

- When a gamer Naman Mathur asked Modi if there was any need for regulations for the gaming sector, he said regulate would not be the right word because it is the government's nature to intervene

Modi sought to know from the gamers about how they deal with the conflict between gaming and gambling. The gamers also discussed with Modi certain terminologies used in the industry such as "noob" and "grind".

They discussed new developments in the gaming industry with Modi, who stressed how the government has recognised the creativity of gamers, promoting the gaming industry in India. They also spoke about issues concerning gambling versus gaming while discussing women's participation in the gaming industry. *—PTI*

KASHMIRI PANDIT OUTFIT MERGES WITH CONGRESS

JAMMU, 13 APRIL

A Kashmiri Pandit outfit, All India Kashmiri Hindu Forum (AIKHF), merged with the Congress at the party headquarters here on Saturday.

Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee president Vikar Rasool Wani welcomed AIKHF chairman Rattan Lal Bhan and other office bearers into the party fold. The AIKHF was formed in 1998. Hundreds of its members joining the Congress is a big boost for the party, Wani told reporters.

He also called on all Kashmiri Pandit organisations to join the party and accused BJP-led central government of "fooling" the community for the past 10 years.

"BJP has been in power for the last 10 years but failed to do any work worth even 10 paise for them," Wani said. "I appeal to other Kashmiri Pandit groups to come back to Congress as BJP is only fooling them for the last 10 years. The Nehru family originally belongs to Kashmir and has a lot of sympathy for the displaced pandits and so does the Congress party as a whole," he added.

Bhan said he decided to merge his outfit with the Congress as the former prime minister Manmohan Singh-led government had done a lot for Kashmiri Pandits. *—PTI*

RJD poll manifesto promises 1 cr govt jobs

PATNA, 13 APRIL

RJD, the largest constituent of Mahagathbandhan in Bihar, on Saturday released its election manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls, promising 1 crore government jobs and Rs 1 lakh per year to "sisters" from poor families on Raksha Bandhan.

Former deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav, while releasing the RJD's election manifesto 'Parivartan Patra', said the party is making 24 "jan vachan" (public promises) for the 2024 polls, and it will fulfill these commitments.

"If INDIA bloc comes to power at the Centre, RJD will ensure that unemployed youth across the country get 1 crore government jobs... the process will start on Independence Day this year... it will be like 'berozgaari se azadi' (freedom from unemployment)," he told reporters. "Unemployment is our biggest enemy but the BJP leaders never talk about it. They had promised 2 crore jobs... but we deliver on our promises," he said. "On the occasion of Raksha Bandhan this year, we will start providing Rs 1 lakh annually to our sisters belonging to poor families," the RJD leader said.

Tejashwi Yadav **PHOTO: PTI**

The manifesto further promised the implementation of the Old Pension Scheme for government employees and LPG cylinders at Rs 500. "For better connectivity in Bihar, we will build five new airports at Purnea, Bhagalpur, Muzaffarpur, Gopalganj and Raxaul, besides sanctioning a special package of Rs 1.60 lakh crore for the overall development of the state. People of Bihar will also get 200 units of free electricity per month," he said. Lok Sabha elections for 40 seats in Bihar will be held in seven phases from 19 April to 1 June. *—PTI*

AAP to observe 'Samvidhan Bachao Divas' today

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

AAP leader and Delhi minister Gopal Rai on Saturday said the party will observe 'Samvidhan Bachao, Tanashahi Hatao Divas' across the country on the birth anniversary of BR Ambedkar on 14 April. The party workers will read the preamble of the Constitution and an oath to save the founding document of the country, Rai said. The minister, at a press conference at the party office here, said the BJP-led central government is "attacking our democracy and constitution". To counter that, we need to be united, Rai said. The programme is being held on the advice of Kejriwal. In another message from the jail, Kejriwal had asked AAP MLAs and volunteers to work to ensure that the people of Delhi face no problems, Rai said. AAP's national convener Arvind Kejriwal is lodged in Tihar jail in connection with a money-laundering case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy. *—PTI*

Gopi becomes 1st Indian Space tourist for NS-25

WASHINGTON, 13 APRIL

Gopi Thotakura, an entrepreneur and a pilot, is set to become the first Indian to venture into space as a tourist on Amazon founder Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin's NS-25 mission. Thotakura was selected as one of the six crew members for the mission, making him the first Indian space tourist and the second Indian to venture into space after the Indian Army's Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma in 1984. The flight date is yet to be announced, the aerospace company said. This mission will be the seventh human flight for the New Shepard programme and the 25th in its history. To date, the programme has flown 31 humans above the Karman line, the proposed conventional boundary between Earth's atmosphere and outer space. New Shepard is a fully reusable sub-orbital launch vehicle developed for space tourism by Blue Origin. According to Blue Origin, "Gopi is a pilot and aviator who learned how to fly before he could drive." *—PTI*

BJP to release its poll manifesto on Sunday

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

BJP will release its manifesto - Sankalp Patra - for the Lok Sabha polls on Sunday, with its planks of welfare and development besides a roadmap for 'viksit Bharat' expected to figure prominently in its election agenda.

The party said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and its other senior leaders will attend the unveiling of the manifesto at the party headquarters that coincides with the birth anniversary of BR Ambedkar, a towering leader from the Dalit community and an architect of the Indian Constitution.

As the BJP government has fulfilled most of its core ideological promises, including the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya and the repeal of Article 370, all eyes will be on how the ruling party's larger cultural and Hindutva agenda figures in the manifesto.

PHOTO: PTI

Party sources said measures for the youth, women, farmers and the poor -- four "castes" Modi has often spoken about -- will be among the highlights of its poll pledges.

BJP had appointed a 27-member manifesto committee headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh that met twice to deliberate on its contents after the party had launched multiple exercises, including vans sent across the country and social media campaigns, to seek people's suggestions. *—PTI*

REAL KERALA STOY

₹34cr to save man from death row

KOZHIKODE, 13 APRIL

The deadline loomed like the sword of Damocles but an astonishing four days is all it took for people in Kerala to channel their compassion and rally together to raise an astounding Rs 34 crore to save a man from the state from the gallows in Saudi Arabia.

In a display of solidarity, people in Kerala have come together to save Abdul Rahim, who hails from Kozhikode, whose only chance to live is to pay the blood money of 15 million Saudi Riyals which comes to around Rs 34 crore, before 18 April, 2024.

Rahim has spent 18 years behind bars in the Gulf nation for allegedly killing a Saudi boy in 2006.

The action committee members told the media that the appeals were rejected by the top courts but later the family agreed to pardon Rahim if he pays 'blood money.'

Abdul Rahim **PHOTO: PTI**

- Kerala have come together to save Abdul Rahim whose only chance to live is to pay the blood money of 15 million Saudi Riyals which comes to around Rs 34 crore

Praising the spirit of Kerala people, Chief Minister, Pinarayi Vijayan, said it was the "Real Kerala Story" of compassion and truth.

He said in the face of relentless hate campaigns targeting Kerala, "the indomitable spirit of Malayalis shines through", upholding together the state's resilience and compassion.

The action committee, which met the media said more than 75 organisations in the Gulf region, along with Kerala-based businessman Bobby Chemmannur and various political organisations in the state, worked tirelessly in the last few days to meet the deadline.

Chemmanur organised multiple events in the past few days to raise money. He also arranged for the sale of one of his products and donated the amount for the cause. The businessman has also assured to give a job to Rahim once he is back in the state. *—PTI*

SC to hear Kejri's plea challenging HC order on 15 Apr

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's plea against a High Court order that has upheld his arrest in a money-laundering case stemming from the alleged excise policy scam.

According to the cause list uploaded on the apex court's website, a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta will hear on 15 April Kejriwal's petition challenging the Delhi High Court's 9 April order.

In a massive blow to the Chief minister, the high court has upheld his arrest in the money-laundering case, saying the Enforcement Directorate (ED) was left with "little option" after he skipped repeated summonses and refused to join the investigation. *—PTI*

2 held for poaching deer in Nagarhole National Park

MYSURU, 13 APRIL

Two people were arrested for allegedly poaching deer in Nagarhole National Park. The accused were caught with hunting equipment by the forest officials while three others managed to escape. The accused M Kaverappa, is a resident of Nalveri village in Virajpet taluk of Kodagu district, and Akarsha VR is from Kothur in Ponnampet taluk. Authorities seized a range of incriminating evidence from the arrested individuals, including an Omni car, an SBBL single barrel gun, a knife, a sword, and cartridges believed to be linked to the criminal activities. The other accomplices Bopanna, Abhi, and Ranju, all from Kothur, however, managed to evade arrest. They are currently on the run, with a single-barrel gun. Officials have registered a case and an investigation is on. *—Salar News*

Head constable dies by suicide in Chikkaballapur

C'BALLAPUR, 13 APRIL

The head constable of the Chikkaballapur District Armed Reserve unit committed suicide on Friday night at his house in the police quarters. The deceased Nagaraj, 40, was living with his mother in one of the quarters allotted to him by the department. Police sources in Chiklaballapur said though the motive for the suicide was known, there are reports that he was not well with his wife. A habitual drunkard Nagaraj used to quarrel with his wife for petty reasons and used to remain absent for duty for long periods. Upset over his attitude his wife reportedly left him some six months back and was living with her parents in Gudibande. Nagaraj reportedly went to his native village for the Ugadi festival and returned home on Friday morning. Nagaraj reportedly hanged himself from the ceiling of the house. Nagaraj was married some eight years back and had a daughter, said police. *—Salar News*

Farmer injured in tiger attack in Chamarajanagar

BENGALURU, 13 APRIL

A 22-year-old man was injured after he was attacked allegedly by a tiger at a village in Chamarajanagara district, the forest department said on Saturday. Mannu suffered injuries on his neck and hands. He is said to be in a stable condition and is currently undergoing treatment at a hospital in Mysuru. According to forest department officials, the incident occurred on Friday at around 6.30pm in Honakanahalli village. The tiger pounced and attacked Mannu when a group of people approached the animal that had taken refuge in a farm. "Mannu escaped with injuries on his neck and hands. He is stated to be out of danger now and undergoing treatment," a senior forest official added. *—PTI*

Cashew worth ₹1.2 cr from K'taka held in M'rashtra

PALGHAR, 13 APRIL

The police in Maharashtra's Palghar district have recovered a big chunk of a cashew consignment worth Rs 1.2 crore that was misappropriated during transportation from Karnataka to Gujarat. A supplier from Karnataka's Udupi district had on 2 April despatched 24.63 metric tonnes of cashew nuts for delivery in Surat and Ahmedabad in Gujarat. When the nuts valued at Rs 1.21 crore, packed in 2,469 boxes, did not reach the destination, the supplier filed a police complaint. Palghar police tracked down the bulk of the consignment to two godowns at Nalasopara in the district and Navi Mumbai. Senior Inspector Rahul Rakha of Central Crime Unit of Mira-Bhayandar, Vasai-Virar Police said they have recovered cashew nuts worth Rs 92.7 lakh. Efforts are on to arrest the accused and to recover the remaining cashew, he added. *—PTI*

CM asks PM on his contribution to State

CM urged people not to vote for Modi

MYSURU, 13 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi
PHOTO: PTI

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi visiting Mysuru and Mangaluru on 14 April to campaign for Lok Sabha polls, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday asked the former to explain what he did for the State.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, "Let him (Modi) come (to Mysuru). We don't have any objection if Modi comes and goes because he is a Prime Minister.

"Let him (Modi) do it (election campaigning) but he should explain what he has done for the people of Karnataka, and to address unemployment, injustice to Karnataka in tax devolution and zero compensation given to the State to mitigate drought."

Later, addressing a public gathering during a road show called 'Janadhwani Yatra' in Mysuru, Siddaramaiah lashed out at Modi and questioned about his promise of bringing back black money stashed abroad, doubling the income of farmers, creating two crore jobs per year and reducing the price of diesel, petrol, gas and fertilisers.

"Would you mind voting for someone who cheated you for 10 years," the Chief Minister asked the crowd.Highlighting the contributions made by Congress for the development of Mysuru city, he said every intelligent person in the town knows who built the Jayadeva Hospital, women and children's hospital, schools and hostels. Siddaramaiah said BJP also had the opportunity to do as much work as Congress did as people gave them a chance, which they missed. He asked people to vote for Congress candidate for Mysuru-Kodagu Lok Sabha constituency M Lakshmana who will have a direct fight with BJP's candidate and scion of Mysuru royal family Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar.

"People of Mysore-Kodagu gave an opportunity to BJP by electing MPs and MLAs but no one including prime minister and chief ministers did any work for the development of the constituency. Now they are just changing the candidate and asking for votes," Siddaramaiah alleged.

"Modi is visiting Mysuru tomorrow. ? Let Modi and his MPs show what they have done for Mysuru. After riding on lies for 10 years, with what face will Modi visit the state?" the Chief Minister asked.

Karnataka is going to the polls in two phases. While 14 Lok Sabha segments in the southern parts of the state will vote on 26 April, the remaining 14 constituencies in the northern parts will vote in the second phase on 7 May. *—PTI*

SIDDARAMAIAH MEETS BJP MP V SRINIVASA PRASAD

MYSURU, 13 APRIL

In a surprising turn of events ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah visited the residence of BJP MP V Srinivasa Prasad in Jayalakshmipuram, in City, on Saturday.

The meeting between the two political stalwarts has raised eyebrows and sparked discussions in the political circles.

The meeting, which lasted for over half an hour, comes at a crucial time when both Congress and BJP are vying for support from influential leaders to bolster their electoral prospects.

During the discussion, Congress candidates from Mysuru-Kodagu Lok Sabha constituency, M Lakshmana, and Sunil Bose, contesting from Chamarajanagar Lok Sabha constituency, reportedly sought Prasad's support.

Prasad, who recently announced his retirement from active politics, had earlier declared that he would not be endorsing or campaigning for any candidate in the upcoming elections. Despite this, both Congress and BJP have been making concerted efforts to woo him, seeking his blessings and support.

Several other political figures were present during the meeting, including MLA AR Krishnamurthy, K Harish Gowda, HM Ganesh Prasad, former MP Kagalawadi Shivanna, and Muda President K Mari Gowda.

—Salar News

CM HITS OUT AT MODI

'NDA may not get majority votes in LS polls'

BENGALURU, 13 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday said that NDA may not secure a majority in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Speaking to reporters in Mysuru, Siddaramaiah said, "BJP's ambitious slogan of "ab ki baar 400 paar" (crossing 400 seats) was a mere electoral strategy."

Siddaramaiah further challenged BJP to address issues such as unemployment and the drought plaguing the State, questioning why these issues remained unresolved by criticising BJP's stance on the Constitution, referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's assurance that it would not be altered.

Siddaramaiah stated, "Modi promised that Rs 15 lakh will be deposited in every Indian's account. Will bring back black money from abroad, double the income of farmers, will create 2 crore jobs a year, will reduce the prices of diesel, petrol, gas, and fertilisers, will increase the value of the rupee against the dollar. They have failed to keep their promises." Modi highlighted a pattern of deception and false promises, urging voters to consider whether they want to support those who have misled them for a decade, he added.

He also hit out at BJP for not taking any action against BJP MP Anantkumar Hegde, who had made controversial remarks suggesting that the Constitution could be changed. Despite BJP's disavowal of Hegde's statements, Siddaramaiah questioned their commitment to the Constitution, citing historical opposition to it by figures like Savarkar and Golwalkar.

—Salar News

JD(S) in existential crisis: DyCM

BENGALURU, 13 APRIL

Deputy Chief Minister and Karnataka Congress President DK Shivakumar hits out on former prime minister HD Deve Gowda's JD(S) party and said they should be more concerned about the survival. Reacting to Deve Gowda's statement Shivakumar said, "Congress has 136 plus seats. He should be concern about predicting the future of JD(S) than Congress in Karnataka."

DK Shivakumar **PHOTO: ANI**

"Let him first clarify whether his party is going to survive. Whether JD(S) will survive or not? Whether JD(S) will merge with BJP or continue to exist as a separate entity?" he said. When asked about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's assurance regarding the Constitution, Shivakumar said Modi's statement was politically motivated. He questioned the timing of the statement, asking why the PM's party had not taken action against those who previously mentioned changing the Constitution. *—Salar News*

ELECTION CAMPAIGNING

BJP North constituency candidate Shobha Karandlaje visits a dhobi ghat during her campaign at Vyalikaval, District returning officers visit door to door to enable postal voting for senior citizens above 85 years in City, Bengaluru North candidate Mansoor Ali Khan campaigns with senior congress leaders in Marthahalli on Saturday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

AHEAD OF POLLS

EC seizes more than ₹27cr worth of freebies, cash

BENGALURU, 13 APRIL

Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls the Election Commission of India (ECI) has seized more than Rs 27 crore worth of freebies, drugs, cash, and liquor. A press release by the Chief Electoral Officer highlighted various actions taken to curb electoral malpractices.

A total of 2980 FIRs have been registered by Flying Squads, SSTs, and police authorities for various violations. Additionally, 47,868 arms have been deposited, 827 arms impounded, and Eight arms licenses cancelled. Preventive action has been taken against 2,725 individuals.

The Excise Department has booked 249 heinous cases, 206 cases for breach of license conditions, and 13 cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. Furthermore, 822 cases have been registered under the Karnataka Excise Act, and 156 vehicles have been seized. A total of 1,740 calls were received through the Voter Helpline, with 1,737 seeking information. Additionally, 6,943 complaints were registered on the NGSP portal.

The cVIGIL application received 1,120 complaints, primarily related to unauthorized posters/banners, property defacement, and distribution of money or gifts. Out of these, 913 complaints were found to be valid, and action has been taken accordingly. A total of 29 complaints were received through various media channels, including emails, letters, newspapers, TV channels, and social media. All complaints have been addressed and disposed of. Under ENCORE, 125 applications for permissions were received, with 65 accepted, 34 rejected, and 21 pending. *—Salar News*

SENIOR BJP LEADER AND FORMER MLA JOINS CONGRESS

DAVANAGERE, 13 APRIL

A senior BJP leader and former MLA of Jagaluru district, T Gurusiddana Gowda, has joined Congress in Davanagere.

Gowda's move comes after facing neglect from BJP leadership, especially after he was side-lined during the Lok Sabha elections.

Gowda's decision to join Congress was also influenced by their expulsion from the party after he was found guilty of campaigning against party candidate SV Ramachandra, a defeated BJP candidate in the assembly constituency.

Accompanying Gowda in this political transition are several BJP leaders and supporters, including TG Ravikumar, Gowda's son and district BJP medical wing chief, TG Arvind. Ravikumar further praised Davanagere district's administration under Mallikarjuna, suggesting that his wife, who is educated, would be an ideal representative for the Lok Sabha, benefiting the constituency. *—Salar News*

Won't withdraw candidacy: Eshwarappa

SHIVAMOGGA, 13 APRIL

Rebel BJP leader and former Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister KS Eshwarappa on Saturday dismissed rumours that he would withdraw his candidature for Lok Sabha elections.

Eshwarappa on Friday filed his nomination papers as an independent candidate from Shivamogga Lok Sabha constituency. He will be contesting against BJP's sitting MP and former Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa's elder son BY Raghavendra and Congress candidate Geetha Shivarajkumar.

The rebel leader said his aim is to "strengthen" Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Some people are spreading rumours that I will withdraw my nomination papers. Those who rally behind me, I would like to say, I will never betray and remain in the fray," Eshwarappa said addressing a press conference.

Eshwarappa who had served as BJP State president has rebelled against the party after the denial of a ticket to his son KE Kantesh from Haveri Lok Sabha constituency.

KS Eshwarappa **PHOTO: PTI**

- The rebel leader said his aim is to "strengthen" Prime Minister Narendra Modi

He has trained his guns on Yediyurappa and his son Raghavendra and BJP State president and Shikaripura MLA BY Vijayendra, accusing them of indulging in dynastic politics.

Stating that Modi resides in his heart, Eshwarappa is using Modi's pictures during campaigns and is sporting a saffron scarf. *—ANI*

RAMESHWARAM CAFE BOMBER SENT TO 10-DAY NIA CUSTODY

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Bengaluru Special National Investigation Agency (NIA) Court judge has sent suspected bomber Mussavir Hussain Shazib and mastermind Abdul Matheen Taha, to 10-day NIA custody in connection with the Rameshwaram cafe bomb blast case which occurred near Whitefield on 1 March.

NIA on Saturday produced Shazib and his accomplice Taha before the magistrate court judge at his residence in Koramangala. Senior counsel Prasanna Kumar argued for the NIA.

NIA had taken the suspected terrorists to an undisclosed location for the investigation. Taha, an engineering graduate, had developed low-intensity Improvised Explosive Device (IED) bombs intended to cause maximum fatalities. The agencies now suspect Taha, with the help of sleeper cells in Tamil Nadu put together the IED at Cuddalore in Tamil Nadu and then brought it to Bengaluru before carrying out the blast. *—Salar News*

₹45.59cr cash, ₹151cr worth alcohol seized so far

BENGALURU, 13 APRIL

PHOTO: PTI

Election Commission on Saturday said Rs 45.59 crore cash and alcohol worth over Rs 151 crore was seized and 1,650 FIRs with regard to seizures have been booked since the model code of conduct came into effect on 16 March.

The general elections in Karnataka will be held in two phases on 26 April and 7 May in 28 constituencies.

According to a statement issued by the office of Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer, since the model code of conduct came into force, the flying squads, static surveillance teams and police authorities have seized Rs 46.59 crore cash, liquor bottles worth over Rs 151 crore, narcotic substances worth Rs 9.93 crore, gold worth Rs 56.86 crore and freebies worth Rs 7.73 crore among other seizures.

They have also registered 1,650 FIRs with regard to seizure of cash, liquor, drugs, precious metal and freebies.

Excise Department has booked 2,086 heinous cases, 2,707 cases for breach of licence conditions, 123 NDPS (Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act) and 13,833 cases under Section 15 (a) of Karnataka Excise Act 1965 and also 1,263 different types of vehicles have been seized. *—PTI*

WAITING FOR DRIZZLE

City awaits rains as North K'taka see showers

BENGALURU, 13 APRIL

The usual pre-monsoon showers seem to be absent this year, raising concerns about the City's water scarcity **PHOTO: PTI**

While North Karnataka has been experiencing a welcome spell of rain, the City continues to wait for its share of the showers. The usual pre-monsoon showers seem to be absent this year, raising concerns about the City's water scarcity.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the answer lies in a complex interplay of weather patterns. A Prasad, an IMD official, told **Salar News** "The southwest monsoon's arrival over Bengaluru is likely to be delayed by a few days. Currently, weak westerly winds are prevailing over the Arabian Sea, which are not capable of the formation of a strong low-pressure system, a key factor for drawing the monsoon towards the Indian subcontinent." Another contributing factor is the persistence of high-pressure systems over the Bay of Bengal, called as Mascarene High. These systems act as a barrier, hindering the monsoon winds from reaching the Indian subcontinent.

Another factor that is the reason for this delay is the La Nina phenomenon, which is characterized by cooler-than-average sea surface temperatures in the equatorial Pacific Ocean. La Nina is known to have a suppressing effect on monsoon rains in India, particularly in the southern peninsula.

While the exact date remains uncertain, the IMD predicts the monsoon to hit Kerala around its usual time frame, and then progress northward. Until the rains arrive, Bengaluru residents might have to endure the summer heat for a bit longer. *—Salar News*

- Another factor that is the reason for this delay is the La Nina phenomenon, which is characterized by cooler-than-average sea surface temperatures in the equatorial Pacific Ocean

PHOTO: PTI

Disgruntled RJD leader Ashfaq Karim joins JD(U)

PATNA, 13 APRIL

Disgruntled RJD leader Ashfaq Karim on Saturday joined the JD(U) headed by Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, alleging "discrimination against Muslims" in the party headed by the latter's arch-rival Lalu Prasad. Karim, who was denied a second term in Rajya Sabha in March this year, and whose hopes of a Lok Sabha ticket from Katihar came a cropper, was inducted into the JD(U) in the presence of national general secretary Sanjay Kumar Jha, state president Umesh Kushwaha and senior minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary. Talking to reporters on the occasion, Karim, who quit RJD late Friday, rued that "only two" Muslims figured in the list of 22 candidates made public by the RJD earlier this week. " Karim, runs a private university in Katihar. *—PTI*

Woman school teacher suspended for attending rally

BHUBANESWAR, 13 APRIL

A woman teacher of a government school in Odisha's Boudh has been suspended by the district election officer-cum-district collector for allegedly attending an election rally and procession, an official notification said on Saturday. The woman teacher of Government Nodal High School at Dahya had allegedly participated in a political rally from Palaspat to Ambagaon in Kantamal assembly constituency two days ago in violation of ECI rules, it said. As per an ECI order dated 15 March, 2024, and Odisha Government Servant's Conduct Rules, 1959, no government servant shall be a member of or be otherwise associated with any political or communal party or any organisation which takes part in politics or communal activities. *—PTI*

FIR's against Cong leader Lakhma for code violation

BIJAPUR, 13 APRIL

Police have registered two cases against senior Congress leader and the party's Bastar Lok Sabha seat candidate Kawasi Lakhma in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district for allegedly violating the model code of conduct through his alleged objectionable remarks. The cases were registered on Friday evening based on the complaints lodged by the district returning officer, he said. Lakhma, who represents the Konta assembly constituency in Sukma district and served as a minister in the previous Bhupesh Baghel-led Congress government, has been fielded by the party in the Bastar Lok Sabha seat. Bijapur district falls in Bastar Lok Sabha constituency. *—PTI*

Youth held over post against Modi, Lord Hanuman

BHADOHI, 13 APRIL

A youth was arrested from Suryawa area of the district here on Saturday for allegedly posting derogatory comment against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and cartoons of Hindu Gods with unparliamentary language on a social media platform, police said. Suryawa Police Station In-charge Ram Nagina Yadav said that on Friday a complaint was received through X about one Sonu Kumar posting indecent remarks against Modi on 26 February from his Facebook account. Cyber Crime Branch investigated the complaint and after finding it to be correct, arrested Sonu Kumar, a native of Pali village. A cartoon of Lord Hanuman burning Lanka and a cartoon of Lord Vishnu holding a bow and arrow was also posted from the same account, Yadav said. *—PTI*

Modi is biggest supporter of reservation: Amit Shah

He said BJP will neither end reservations nor allow anyone to do it

JAIPUR, 13 APRIL

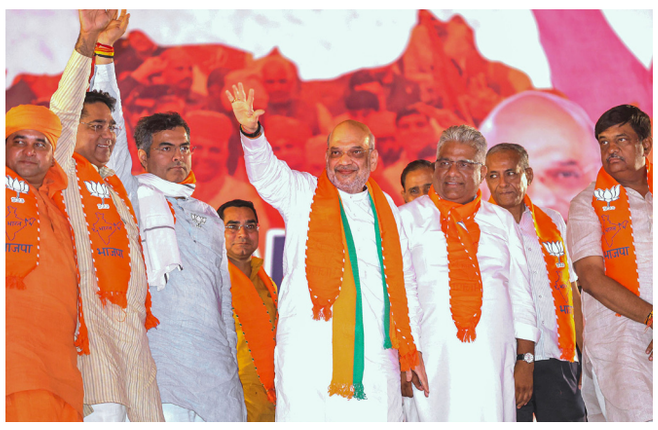
BJP will neither end reservations nor allow anyone to do it, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Saturday and accused the Congress of spreading a misconception that the ruling party wants to abolish quota for the Dalits, tribals and backwards.

"(Prime Minister Narendra) Modi himself is the biggest supporter of reservation," Shah said at an election rally in Harsoli in Rajasthan's Alwar district.

He alleged that Congress was "anti-OBC" and had put in cold storage key reports on the issue of reservation.

"I want to make one thing clear. Congress party is spreading misconception, especially among Dalit and tribal brothers, that the BJP is going to abolish reservation.

Shah's assertion came in the backdrop of Congress' election manifesto promise of bringing a constitutional amendment to raise the 50 per cent cap on reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs. The Congress has also said a caste census will be undertaken if it is voted to power. He alleged that Congress did injustice to the backward classes for years.



Amit Shah during a rally in Harsoli, Rajasthan PHOTO: PTI

- BJP government in Rajasthan has moved towards ensuring women's safety and ending appeasement

"It kept the Kaka Kalelkar report suppressed, kept the Mandal Commission report suppressed. Modi came and worked to give constitutional recognition to the OBC Commission.

"Modi has done the work of giving 27 per cent reservation to the OBC community in all recruitments at the Centre," Shah said.

"Modi ji has to be made the Prime Minister for the third time. ... In ten years, Modi ji has done many things which seemed impossible. Modi ji has a record of 10 years and planning for 25 years," he said,

Regarding the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project ERCP, he said, "ERCP is going to be completed soon, this is a guarantee of the Modi government."

Shah said that the BJP government in Rajasthan has moved towards ensuring women's safety and ending appeasement.

Taking a dig at Congress, he said, "Modi ji says 'save daughter - educate daughter' whereas Congress says 'save son - make PM'."

Lok Sabha elections in Rajasthan will be held in two phases on 19 and 26 April. In the first phase, voting will be held in 12 seats -- Ganganagar, Bikaner, Churu, Jhunjhunu, Sikar, Jaipur Rural, Jaipur, Alwar, Bharatpur, Karauli-Dholpur, Dausa and Nagaur.

In the second phase, voting will be held in 13 seats -- Tonk, Ajmer, Pali, Jodhpur, Barmer, Jalore, Udaipur, Banswara, Chittorgarh, Rajsamand, Bhilwara, Kota and Jhalawar. *—PTI*

KERALA LS POLLS

Congress-led UDF deliberately sought SDPI support, says LDF

KANNUR, 13 APRIL

The ruling LDF in Kerala on Saturday accused the opposition Congress of deliberately seeking votes of the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), the political arm of the banned Popular Front of India (PFI), for the Lok Sabha elections.

LDF Convener EP Jayarajan, at the release of the Kannur Lok Sabha constituency's manifesto here, said that SDPI announcing its support for Congress-led UDF did not come out of the blue and was the outcome of several rounds of discussions between the two.

"Subsequently, they decided to offer their support to the UDF as requested by it," he contended.

He was responding to a query by reporters on the SDPI's offer of support to the UDF, which in turn, had rejected its organisational support.

Jayarajan further said that the acting KPCC Chief and UDF convener, had welcomed all and any votes that came their way.He claimed that the Congress and the UDF were scared of the pro-Left wave in the state and that is why it was seeking the support of the SDPI to win in the elections.

EP Jayarajan, MM Hassan, and K Sudhakaran PHOTO: PTI

- Congress in Kerala had rejected the organisational support announced by the SDPI in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections but had welcomed individual voters to support the UDF

"Not just SDPI, they are also seeking support of another similar organisation," he alleged.

Congress in Kerala had rejected the organisational support announced by the SDPI in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections but had welcomed individual voters to support the UDF. *—PTI*

KPCC president and Congress candidate from Kannur K Sudhakaran had accepted the SDPI support and MM Hassan,

Sonal Patel, Amit Shah PHOTO: PTI

'Not hesitant to fight against Amit Shah'

GANDHINAGAR, 13 APRIL

Sonal Patel, whom Congress has fielded against Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Gujarat's Gandhinagar Lok Sabha constituency, said she was not at all hesitant to fight the upcoming election against the senior BJP leader.

The 62-year-old leader, who is All India Congress Committee (AICC) secretary and the party co-incharge of Mumbai and western Maharashtra, claimed that anti-incumbency prevails as BJP has failed to fulfil the aspirations of people.

She also accused the ruling party of intimidating Congress workers in her constituency and sought a "level-playing field" in fighting elections. Police are calling our city and district leaders to police stations in some frivolous cases from the past. BJP is using administrative machinery to fight elections," she alleged.

"He (Shah) may be the home minister of the country, but we have seen him from the days when he was a common BJP worker," she said.

"From a grassroot worker from Naranpura (Amit Shah's assembly constituency when he was MLA) he has risen to be the home minister of the country. My father was Congress municipal councillor from Naranpura and we have seen him grow. I have also worked my way up from grassroots like him," she said.

- From a grassroot worker from Naranpura (Amit Shah's assembly constituency when he was MLA) he has risen to be the home minister of the country. My father was Congress municipal councillor from Naranpura and we have seen him grow

"And when people cast their vote, they will not choose (their MP) thinking that he is the home minister or that I am a simple party worker," she said, adding that that was the reason she did not hesitate even a bit to contest the election against Shah.

The Congress had earlier fielded bigwigs like former election commissioner T N Seshan, actor Rajesh Khanna to give a fight to BJP heavyweights from Gandhinagar seat. After her name was announced, Patel began campaigning by organising voters' meetings and visiting different areas of the constituency.

On the main issues in the constituency, she said anti-incumbency prevails as the BJP has failed to fulfil the aspirations of the people of the state. *—PTI*

Will keep alive Article 370 issue: Omar Abdullah

SRINAGAR, 13 APRIL

National Conference leader Omar Abdullah on Saturday said the Supreme Court upholding the abrogation of Article 370 does not close the issue and his party will keep it alive till a dispensation comes at the Centre that is willing to discuss the restoration of special status to Jammu and Kashmir.

"This government will not remain forever. There is no power on earth that can keep Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi in office in perpetuity, there is no power on earth that can keep the BJP in office forever.

Every government has a finite term, some are longer, some are shorter. Why would you assume that no government will come in future that will be unwilling to talk to us on Article 370," Abdullah told PTI in an interview here.

Abdullah, who is contesting the Lok Sabha polls from north Kashmir Baramulla constituency, said the Supreme Court verdict on petitions challenging abrogation of the Article 370 was unfortunate.

"We will continue to fight for it and struggle for it, the recent judgement of Supreme Court is unfortunate, but that won't stop our political fight," the former J-K chief minister said.

He claimed that several opposition parties were also on the same page. *—PTI*

ELECTION CAMPAIGNING

BJP will not even win 200 Lok Sabha seats, says Mamata

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee addresses an election campaign rally in Cooch Behar district on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

JALPAIGURI, 13 APRIL

Alleging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guarantees are "false", West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday claimed that BJP will not even win 200 seats in upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Speaking at an election rally for party candidate Nirmal Chandra Roy, Trinamool Congress supremo also accused BJP of destroying the country's Constitution. "What have they done for north Bengal? Do not fall prey to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guarantees. These are nothing but electoral jumla (false). Modi's guarantee is not to give Bengal its dues," Banerjee said at TMC's programme. BJP-led NDA is aiming at crossing the 400 Lok Sabha seat mark in the upcoming elections. "Before the (2021) Assembly elections, you (BJP) had said they would win over 200 seats in Bengal, but your run stopped at 70. At the moment out of the 70, ten have already joined us. Now, in this Parliamentary elections, you are claiming to win 400. I tell you to get 200 first," she said.

Banerjee described BJP leaders as "birds who surface during elections".

"You (BJP) have destroyed the country's Constitution drafted by Babasaheb Ambedkar. You have sold the entire country," she alleged. TMC Supremo, without naming BJP leader Amit Malviya, lambasted him for calling West Bengal a 'safe haven for terrorists' soon after NIA arresting two persons in the Bengaluru blast case.

The Chief Minister attacked BJP-led Centre not allegedly clearing dues related to the 'PM Awas Yojana' and '100 days' scheme' to West Bengal.

"They have taken over Rs 6.80 lakh crore as revenue and the due amount is Rs 1.74 lakh crore. How will I run the government? Before calling us thieves, I challenge you to bring out the statistics of Gujarat, Maharashtra and UP on the Awas Yojana and the 100-day scheme. They (BJP) are the biggest thieves, dacoits, and mafias in the country," she said. *—PTI*

AUTOCRACY DETRIMENTAL TO COUNTRY: UDDHAV

MUMBAI, 13 APRIL

Shiv Sena (UBT) Chief Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday said autocracy was detrimental to the country and called for having a coalition government at the Centre, saying that such dispensations have "worked well" in the past.

There is a need for a strong leader, but he should take everybody along, he said. Speaking at his residence 'Matoshree' in Mumbai, where office-bearers of BJP, Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS) and Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) from Jalgaon district joined his party, he said that for the first time in the last 10 years, discontent was visible at such a large scale in the country.

"We want a strong country and a coalition government. We want a strong leader, but who can take everyone together," Thackeray said. He said Opposition INDIA can provide a coalition government. He also said the Maha Vikas Aghadi parties will soon hold joint rallies in the state. *—PTI*

BENGALI HINDUS IN ASSAM ASKED TO LIE FOR CITIZENSHIP: GAURAV GOGOI

MAJULI, 13 APRIL

Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi has accused BJP-led government of pushing Assam's bonafide Bengali Hindus to lie about their origins for obtaining citizenship under CAA and warned that this "divide and rule" policy will create a Manipur-like situation in the state.

In an interview with PTI, Deputy Leader of Congress in Lok Sabha, slammed Centre over the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 and claimed that it is forcing the people, who were excluded from National Register of Citizens (NRC), to "commit perjury" to get Indian citizenship.

He claimed CAA is mainly aimed to benefit those Assam-born Bengali Hindus, who for some reason did not feature in NRC. The final NRC was released on 31 August, 2019, and excluded over 19 lakh people. *—PTI*

Udhampur to vote first time after abrogation of Article 370

UDHAMPUR, 13 APRIL

Udhampur constituency will go to polls in the first phase of Lok Sabha elections on 19 April, the first general elections in Jammu and Kashmir since the abrogation of Article 370.

Jammu and Kashmir will send five MPs to the Lok Sabha, the elections for which will be held in five phases.

BJP has fielded Union Minister Jitendra Singh from Udhampur who has been representing the constituency since 2014. Singh had defeated former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad from Udhampur in 2014.

Congress has fielded Choudhary Lal Singh from Udhampur. Lal Singh returned to the party six years after he was forced to resign following his participation in a rally held in support of the Kathua rape accused, in which a child was raped. Peoples Democratic Party, partner in INDIA bloc, has extended their support to Lal Singh.

This election will take place following the two important bills: the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2023 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023.

When the Central government is working to promote the 'Naya Kashmir' citing the range of infrastructural development and the reduction in terrorism, the J&K will undergo first general elections from Udhampur. *—ANI*

M'RASHTRA BATTLE

Friends are foes and foes have turned friends

MUMBAI, 13 APRIL

With parties breaking up and new alliances forming, Maharashtra is seeing head-spinning political realignments in 2024 Lok Sabha elections where one-time colleagues have become rivals, and enemies have become allies.

An illustration of this was on display at Union minister Amit Shah's rally in Nanded on Thursday where former chief minister Ashok Chavan and BJP candidate Pratap Patil Chikhalikar shared the stage. Chikhalikar, then the MLA of undivided Shiv Sena from Loha in Latur district, joined BJP in 2019 and went on to defeat sitting Congress MP Ashok Chavan from Nanded, a Congress bastion, in ensuing Lok Sabha elections.

Maharashtra is seeing head-spinning political realignments in the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha election PHOTO: PTI

Modi, at a campaign rally then, had targeted Chavan over the Adarsh society scam, while then chief minister Devendra Fadnavis had said Chavan was a "dealer and not a leader." Chavan joined BJP in February this year, and became its Rajya Sabha member.

Shrirang Barne of the Shiv Sena defeated Parth Pawar, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Ajit Pawar's son, in the Maval Lok Sabha constituency in 2019. It was the first time a member of Sharad Pawar's extended family tasted electoral defeat.

Amol Kolhe, a popular television and film actor who was then with the undivided Shiv Sena, to cross over to the NCP and contest against sitting Shiv Sena MP Shivajirao Adhalrao-Patil in Shirur Lok Sabha constituency in 2019. Kolhe defeated Adhalrao-Patil. Kolhe is now with the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP). In the seat-sharing arrangement of the ruling BJP-Shiv Sena-NCP 'Mahayuti' alliance, Shirur seat went to Ajit, and with the intention of defeating Kolhe, he inducted Adhalrao Patil into NCP. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

200 booked for causing traffic congestion in UP

MEERUT, 13 APRIL

Two hundred people were booked for allegedly causing traffic congestion by offering Namaz on a road here, police said on Saturday.The crowd moved to the road to offer Eid Namaz as the space inside the nearby mosque was filled. They allegedly had an altercation with the police when they prevented them from offering Namaz on the road, police said.The sub-inspector of the Railway Road police station filed a complaint on Friday alleging that over 100 to 200 people offered Eid Namaz on Thursday on the road which led to severe traffic congestion, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Rohit Singh Sajwan said.Based on the complaint police have lodged an FIR under sections 143 (unlawful assembly), 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), 186 (obstructing public servant in discharge of duty) and 341 (wrongful restraint) of the Indian Penal Code, Sajwan said.—*PTI*

Devotees offer prayers on Baisakhi

CHANDIGARH, 13 APRIL

Devotees across Punjab and Haryana offered prayers at gurdwaras on the occasion of the Baisakhi festival on Saturday. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann greeted people on the occasion of 'Sajna Divas' of the 'Khalsa Panth' and 'Baisakhi'. Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Saini also greeted people on the occasion of Baisakhi. Devotees thronged the gurdwaras, including Amritsar's Sri Harmandir Sahib also known as the Golden Temple, Sri Kesgarh Sahib in Anandpur Sahib, Damdama Sahib in Bathinda and Nada Sahib in Haryana's Panchkula and paid obeisance. —*PTI*

Man fires at sisters and neice over dispute, held

SHIMLA, 13 APRIL

A man was arrested for allegedly opening fire on three women of his family over a personal dispute in Himachal's Kinnar area, police said on Saturday. According to the police, the incident occurred on Friday in Purbani village, when Raj Chander opened fire on his two sisters and a niece while the family was preparing for the wedding of Chander's nephew.The injured were rushed to the Indira Gandhi Medical College & Hospital in Shimla and later referred to Reckong Peo District Hospital. One of the two sisters Krishan Leela and niece Sweety sustained serious injuries while the other sister Bharti is said to be out of danger, police said. A case has been registered against Chander under the sections of IPC.—*PTI*

Five youth drown in UP's Kasganj canal

KASGANJ,13 APRIL

Five youths died by drowning in a canal in Uttar Pradesh's Kasganj, police said on Saturday.The deceased were identified as Shahid, Abhishek, Salman, Asif, and Jahid, aged between 16 and 22, all residents of Etah district. According to the police, the incident happened when a group of nine youths entered the Hazara canal in the Nadrai area of the district on Friday for a bath. However, they slipped into deep water and started drowning due to the strong current.Four of them were able to come out of the water, but others could not. Hearing their screams, locals reached the spot and informed the police.nLater on, local police, along with the SDRF teams, started the rescue operation and fetched out two bodies on Friday only. On Saturday, rescue operations were relaunched.—*ANI*

Army marks 40 years in the world's highest battlefield

DHAR, 22 MARCH

The induction of heavy-lift helicopters and logistic drones, deployment of all-terrain vehicles and laying of an extensive network of tracks are among a host of measures that have enhanced India's combat prowess in Siachen, the world's highest battlefield, officials said on Saturday.

As the Indian Army marks the 40th year of its presence on the strategically-significant Siachen glacier, the officials said there have been extensive improvements in the operational capabilities of the force due to the enhancement of infrastructure in the region in the last few years.

The Siachen glacier at the height of around 20,000 feet in the Karakoram mountain range is known as the highest militarised zone in the world where soldiers have to battle frostbite and high winds.

Under its "Operation Meghdoot", the Indian Army established its full control over the glacier on 13 April, 1984.

The initiatives, especially laid out in the last five years, have made significant strides in improving the living conditions and operational capabilities of the personnel deployed in Siachen, he said on the condition of anonymity.

In January last year, Captain Shiva Chauhan from the Army's Corps of Engineers was posted at a frontline post in the Siachen glacier, in the first such operational deployment of a woman Army officer at a key battlefield.

- As the Indian Army marks the 40th year of its presence on the strategically-significant Siachen glacier, the officials said there have been extensive improvements in the operational capabilities of the force due to the enhancement of infrastructure in the region in the last few years

The official cited above said there has been a noteworthy improvement in the aspect of mobility in Siachen.

There has been a focus on improvement in mobile and data connectivity in the region as well. The VSAT or very small aperture terminal is a data-transmission technology. The Army has also been focusing on boosting the medical infrastructure in Siachen.

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has established telemedicine nodes that provide critical medical support not only to the troops but also to the local populace and tourists in the Nubra valley.

HAPO (High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema) chamber is a life-saving device that provides emergency treatment in medical conditions relating to breathlessness and accumulation of fluids in the lungs etc. —*PTI*

The Siachen glacier at the height of around 20,000 feet in the Karakoram mountain range is known as the highest militarised zone in the world PHOTO: PTI

AI raises complex considerations: CJI

Use of AI can change how legal work is done

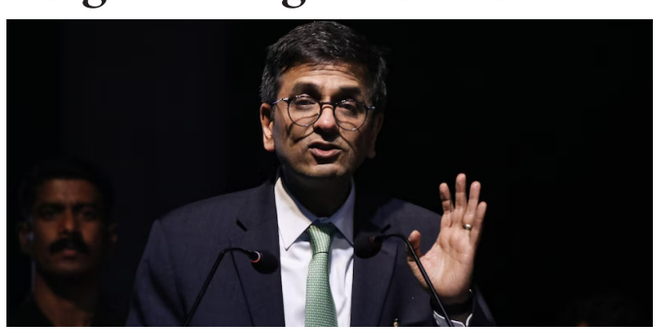
NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in modern processes, including court proceedings, raises complex ethical, legal and practical considerations that demand a thorough examination, Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud said on Saturday.

The CJI said AI represents the "next frontier of innovation" and its use in court adjudication presents both opportunities and challenges that warrant nuanced deliberation.

Justice Chandrachud said while AI presents unprecedented opportunities, it also raises complex challenges, particularly concerning ethics, accountability and bias and addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from stakeholders worldwide, transcending geographical and institutional boundaries.

Justice Chandrachud said in the legal sector, AI holds immense potential to transform the way legal professionals work, from enhancing legal research and case analysis to improving the efficiency of court proceedings.



CJI Chandrachud said AI represents the 'next frontier of innovation' and its use in court adjudication presents both opportunities and challenges PHOTO: PTI

With the launch of ChatGPT, a conversation has emerged about whether to rely on AI in reaching a conclusion for a case, the CJI said.

"These instances show that we cannot avoid the question of using AI in court adjudication. The integration of AI in modern processes, including court proceedings, raises complex ethical, legal, and practical considerations that demand a thorough examination," he said.

The CJI said amid the excitement surrounding AI's capabilities, there are also concerns regarding potential errors and misinterpretations.

"Without robust auditing mechanisms in place, instances of 'hallucinations' – where AI generates false or misleading responses – may occur, leading to improper advice and, in extreme cases, miscarriages of justice," he said. Justice Chandrachud said the impact of bias in AI systems presents a complex challenge, particularly when it comes to indirect discrimination. —*PTI*

Devotees perform rituals during the 'Charak' festival celebration, in Agartala. on Saturday. Charak a folk festival performed in honour of lord Shiva PHOTO: PTI

IN SANDESHKHALI

Spot inquiry points to 'violation' of rights, says NHRC

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

In a spot inquiry into the Sandeshkhali case in West Bengal, National Human Rights Commission NHRC has flagged "several instances of atrocities", saying it indicates that there was a "violation of human rights" due to "negligence" in the prevention of such incidents.

NHRC, in its report, also observed that the "pervasive fear of reprisal, coupled with the power dynamics at play, acted as a formidable barrier", preventing individuals from voicing their grievances.

The rights panel has made several recommendations and sought an action taken report (ATR) within eight weeks on each of the recommendations made therein from the government of West Bengal, the NHRC said in a statement on Saturday.

The Commission has sent its spot inquiry report to the chief secretary and DGP, West Bengal for submitting ATR.

NHRC report made an observation that the "atmosphere due to the atrocities by the alleged accused persons rendered the victims silent", and intimidation, and terror made them "reluctant to seek justice".

This "climate of terror" not only "perpetuates the cycle of abuse" but also underscores the urgent need to create a safe and supportive environment for victims to "break free from the shackles of silence", it has observed.

The rights panel has also made an observation that the "atmosphere of fear" not only affects the victims but also has a "negative impact" on the growth and health of the children who constantly witness the ordeals of their parents at the hands of these alleged accused. —*PTI*

HARYANA YOUTUBER COUPLE JUMP OFF 7TH FLOOR; DIE

BAHADURGARH, 13 APRIL

A young couple in a live-in relationship in Haryana's Bahadurgarh allegedly died by suicide by jumping from the seventh floor of their rented apartment, police said on Saturday.

According to officials, the couple, identified as Garvit,25, and Nandini,22, committed suicide by jumping from the 7th floor of Ruhil Residency, located in Haryana's Bahadurgarh.

The deceased couple used to run their channel on YouTube and also made short films for it.Just a few days ago, both of them had come to Bahadurgarh from Dehradun with their team. They rented an apartment on the seventh floor of the building and started living with around five of their teammates.Police said that the couple returned home late at night after a shoot. There was an argument between the two over an issue, following which they took the extreme step at around 6:00 am, they said. Upon receiving information, a team of police reached the spot, and the bodies were sent for post-morte. —*ANI*

Andaman cops launch chatbot to tackle cybercrime

PORT BLAIR, 13 APRIL

The Andaman and Nicobar (ANI) Police have come out with a state-of-the-art chatbot to engage the general public with law enforcement agencies in tackling and raising awareness related to cybercrime cases in the archipelago, an officer said.

Named 'Island's Cyber Saarthi' – the chatbot (a computer programme which enables a person to interact via text or voice message with the digital device) was the brainchild of the Director General of Police of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Devesh Chandra Srivastava.

It was executed by Superintendent of Police, CID, Rajeev Ranjan along with a team of young officers including Lakshay Pandey, DSP, Cyber Cell.

As per statistics available with the ANI police, in 2023 and 2024 (till March) a total of 60 cyber-related cases were registered in the entire islands.

Speaking to PTI, the DGP, said, "I would like to commend the ANI police for achieving a significant milestone in law enforcement technology with the introduction of the chatbot. This cutting-edge tool marks a groundbreaking advancement, positioning the union territory as a leader in technological innovation in tackling cybercrimes. This underscores our commitment to embracing innovation in the digital era."To access Island's Cyber Saarthi' one has to scan a QR code which will direct the user to the chatbot, where any citizens can seek advice, ask questions or lodge complaints directly related to cybercrime through text or voice messages. "This helps people be better informed during elections, thereby keeping elections free and fair," Ranjan said. This chatbot will also serve as a proactive agent in combating cyber threats. —*PTI*

PREZ PAYS TRIBUTES TO JALLIANWALA BAGH MARTYRS

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

President Droupadi Murmu expressed heartfelt tributes on Saturday to the people who sacrificed their lives for the country in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and said the spirit of patriotism of those martyrs will keep inspiring the coming generations.

Hundreds of people protesting peacefully against the Rowlatt Act, which granted repressive powers to the colonial administration, were gunned down by British forces without any provocation on this day in 1919 at Jallianwala Bagh in Punjab's Amritsar.

"My heartfelt tribute to all the freedom fighters who sacrificed everything for the motherland in Jallianwala Bagh! The countrymen will always be indebted to all those great souls who sacrificed their lives for swaraj. I am sure that the spirit of patriotism of those martyrs will always inspire the coming generations," the president said in a post in Hindi on X. —*PTI*

AAP'S FRESH JIBE

Kejri not allowed to meet family: Sanjay

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

Senior AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh on Saturday claimed that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was not being allowed in-person meetings with his family in Tihar jail.

Addressing a press conference, Singh said, "There is an attempt to break the morale of Chief Minister Kejriwal."

"His family has not been allowed in-person meetings with him. They are only allowed to meet him through the jangla. This is inhuman. Even hardcore criminals are allowed in-person meetings," the AAP leader said.

"In the same Tihar jail, many meetings take place... but Arvind Kejriwal, a three-time elected Chief Minister, is being humiliated and made to meet his family through the jangla. This is happening at the behest of the BJP-led Central government," Singh said. "His rights as an inmate are being snatched," said the AAP leader. who was granted bail by the Supreme Court earlier this month in the Delhi excise policy case. There was no immediate reaction from the Tihar administration. —*PTI*

20 HOURS ON

Rescue ops on to save boy trapped in borewell

BHOPAL, 13 APRIL

Efforts to rescue the six-year-old boy from a borewell in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa district continued for more than 20 hours on Saturday, with a team from the State Disaster Emergency Response Force (SDERF) and local administration working overnight, an official said.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said he was monitoring the situation and is in constant touch with the local authorities.

According to officials, the incident occurred at Manika village near the Uttar Pradesh border around 3pm on Friday, when the boy was playing near the open borewell.

The news of an innocent child falling into a borewell in Manika village of Rewa district was unfortunate, Yadav said in a post on X.

he incident occurred at Manika village near the Uttar Pradesh border around 3pm on Friday PHOTO: x

"An SDERF team and district administration were trying to get the child out safely. I am also in constant touch with the local administration," he said.

Deputy Chief Minister Rajendra Shukla has been instructed to visit the site, he added.

The rescue operation continued throughout Friday night, an official said.

Rewa Collector Pratibha Pal and Superintendent of Police (SP) Vivek Singh monitored the situation at night, the official said.

The SDERF was pressed into service to save the boy stuck at a depth of around 40 feet, Pal had said on Friday night.

Additional Superintendent of Police Anil Sonkar had earlier said oxygen was being supplied to the boy through a pipe, and a CCTV camera was lowered into the well to monitor his condition, but it could not reach him due to some obstruction.The borewell is about 70 feet deep, and a parallel pit is being dug to rescue the child. —*PTI*

Can't have rules: EAM on combating terrorism

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

PHOTO: ANI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said that India was committed to respond to any act of terrorism perpetrated from across the borders, and asserted that since terrorists do not play by rules, there cannot be any rules in the country's answer to them.

Attacking the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) dispensation over its response to the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks in 2008, he said that after a lot of deliberation at the government level, nothing fruitful came out at that time as it was felt that the cost of attacking Pakistan was more than not attacking it.

Interacting with youth on Friday at an event titled 'Why Bharat Matters: Opportunity for youth and participation in global scenario' here, he asked that if a similar attack happens now and one does not react to it, how can the next such attacks be prevented.

Jaishankar also said that the country's foreign policy has undergone a change since 2014 and it is the way terrorism is dealt with.When asked about countries with which India finds it challenging to maintain relationships, Jaishankar said India should question whether it should maintain any relationship with certain countries. "one country that is very, very difficult is Pakistan," he said. —*PTI*

BAISAKHI FESTIVAL

Devotees gather at the Har Ki Pauri ghat on the occasion of Baisakhi, in Haridwar, on Saturday
PHOTO: PTI

Experts fear global outbreak of whooping cough

The increasing number of cases has been attributed to the weakening of the vaccine's long-term effects in China ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

Whooping cough, a highly contagious respiratory illness also known as pertussis, is making a concerning comeback across the globe. Outbreaks are being reported in numerous countries, raising concerns about vaccine efficacy and the vulnerability of young children.

China has reported a more than 20-fold increase in whooping cough cases in January and February compared to the same period last year. After confirming 32,380 cases and 13 deaths, Chinese authorities warned that it is a major cause of mortality among infants and young children globally.

However, whooping cough can affect people of all ages when immunity wanes over time. The increasing number of cases has been attributed to the weakening of the vaccine's long-term effects in China.

According to an expert cited by Chinese tabloid newspaper Global Times, the diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTP) vaccine used in the country faces production and quality control challenges unlike vaccines manufactured in developed countries.

The disease experiences a cyclical rise every three to five years, but incidences have been growing for more than twenty years. Another potential reason researchers are considering behind the rising incidences of pertussis over the last two decades is the impact of outdoor air pollution in China.

According to a 2023 study by Chinese scientists published in the journal BMC Public Health, a short-term high monthly carbon dioxide and ozone exposure, with a 10 micrograms per cubic metre increase in nitrogen dioxide (NO2) and ozone corresponded with surges.

"One possible mechanism of NO2 and other air pollutants was that, regardless of the duration of exposure, high levels of NO2 can irritate airways and increase susceptibility to respiratory infections.

- After confirming 32,380 cases and 13 deaths, Chinese authorities warned that it is a major cause of mortality among infants and young children globally

Compared with adults, children are at a higher risk because they breathe at higher rates and spend more time outdoors and their lungs and immune systems are immature," the paper said.

The bordetella pertussis bacteria that causes whooping cough also appears to have mutated, particularly in Australia. The country is facing its worst outbreak since 2013, with 2,799 cases recorded in the first three months of 2024.

A strain of the virus that was pertactin-deficient appeared to have become the dominant strain by 2017 in Australia. Pertactin is a key protein targeted by the vaccine, reported The Conversation, a network of nonprofit media outlets.

The resurgence of whooping cough worldwide also includes several European nations. In contrast to the 1,200 cases discovered throughout 2023 in Spain, the country experienced an outbreak of 8,200 cases by March 2024.

Similarly, the Czech Republic has reported a record number of cases after more than 70 years, with over 6,300 this year. Post the Covid-19 pandemic, a World Health Organisation (WHO) spokesperson told television news network Euronews that only 50 per cent of the countries in the European region have been able to vaccinate 90 per cent of their population.

According WHO, in 2022, 20.5 million children missed out on one or more doses of their DTP vaccines.

—Downtoearth

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

2300 bn tonnes of carbon in soil could stop climate change

A new research has estimated more than 2,300 billion tonnes of inorganic carbon in minerals in the top two metres of soil worldwide, a finding that scientists say "underscores the urgency of incorporating inorganic carbon into climate change mitigation strategies."

Inorganic carbon is found in ores and minerals, as opposed to organic carbon, which can be found in nature through plants and animals.

Researchers said that international initiatives aimed at increasing organic carbon content in soil - soil organic carbon (SOC) - should also consider the critical role of soil inorganic carbon (SIC) in achieving sustainable soil management and climate change mitigation.

Solid SIC, often calcium carbonate, tends to accumulate more in arid regions with infertile soils, which has led many to believe it is not important, they said.

However, SIC also plays a dual role in storing carbon and supporting ecosystem functions that depend on it, said the researchers, led by the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS).

Thus, they said, SIC can be an "additional lever" in maintaining and enhancing carbon sequestration, which refers to capturing carbon dioxide, either from the air or directly from the point of production, and storing it for long term. Carbon sequestration is considered a key method for removing carbon from the Earth's atmosphere.

While society has recognised the importance of soil to be fundamental to nature-based solutions for combating climate change, the major focus has been on the SOC. It is now clear that inorganic carbon deserves equal attention, the researchers said.

SIC plays a dual role in storing carbon ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

- Inorganic carbon is found in ores and minerals, as opposed to organic carbon, which can be found in nature through plants and animals

They said their SIC estimates of more than 2,300 billion tonnes are more than five times the carbon found in all of the world's vegetation put together, and that this could be key to understanding how carbon moves around the world.

"But here's the thing: This huge carbon pool is vulnerable to changes in the environment, especially soil acidification. Acids dissolve calcium carbonate and remove it either as carbon dioxide gas or directly into the water," said Huang Yuanyuan, professor, the Institute of Geographic Sciences, CAS, and co-lead author of the study published in the journal 'Science'.

"Many regions in countries like China and India are experiencing soil acidification due to industrial activities and intense farming. Without remedial actions and better soil practices, the world is likely to face a disturbance of SIC in the next thirty years," she said.

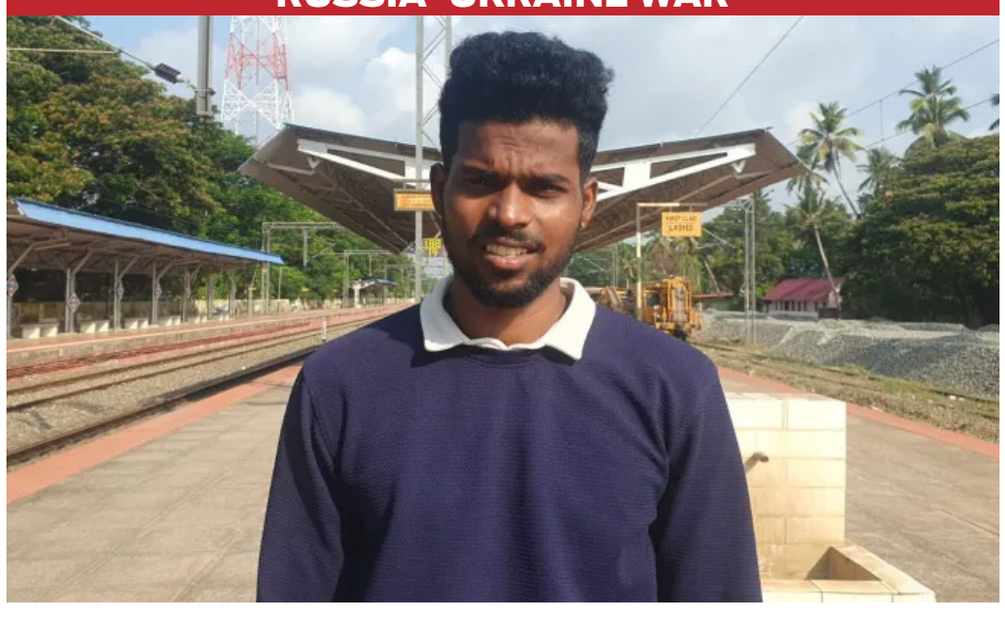
A disturbance of SIC can hamper plant growth by disrupting the soil's ability to counter acidity, regulate nutrients and stabilise organic carbon.

—PTI

Inorganic carbon deserves equal attention according to research ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

'Bullet in my head': Indian man who crawled to escape war

RUSSIA- UKRAINE WAR



Prince Sebastian was a fisherman from Kerala who escaped from Russian war ***PHOTO: ALJAZEERA***

A tangled gun strap almost cost Prince Sebastian his life.

It was 6pm local time on 4 February. Prince and his contingent of soldiers fighting for the Russian army were advancing towards a battlefield in Luhansk in occupied Ukraine. It wasn't what Prince – a fisherman from Kerala 5,470km (3,400 miles) away – had signed up for, but at that moment, he felt he had no option but to keep moving, a Russian soldier by his side, the frantic symphony of gunfire their unwelcome soundtrack.

Suddenly, there was chaos as they came under attack, a hail of bullets fired in their direction. A superior barked out orders, asking the soldiers to fire back. But in the split second that Prince lost because of the tangled strap, a bullet ricocheted off their Russian tank with a sickening thud and pierced his left ear, flooding his mouth with blood.

When he slowly came to his wits, Prince began a long, 3km (1.8 miles) crawl through mud and an even longer fight to escape Russia's army. Now, two months later, he is back home in Anju Thengu, a coastal village near Kerala's capital Thiruvananthapuram, safe from the war he had found himself trapped in.

But as the lean 24-year-old recalls the horrors that he managed to leave behind, he knows he has returned to the very life he had tried to get away from when he went to Russia: one of poverty, joblessness and an uncertain future. He's back where he started, with a lifetime's nightmares to boot.

- Kerala has long had among India's best education and health indices, but it also has the highest unemployment rates for young adults in the country

Fishing for a future

It was the dream of a new start that made Prince and his fishermen cousins, Vineeth Silva and Tinu Paniadiam, all in their early 20s, decide to migrate to Russia in January.

Increasingly erratic weather patterns have reduced both the number of days fisherfolk can head out to sea and the catch they return with. The shoreline has suffered from human activity. And there are few other jobs around. Kerala has long had among India's best education and health indices, but it also has the highest unemployment rates for young adults in the country: more than 28 percent, compared with a national average of 10 percent for people in the 15-29 age group.

A Russian official took Prince to an army camp in Rostov, the southern Russian city that is the headquarters of the Kremlin's war in Ukraine. The officers spoke to Prince in English, but he had to sign several documents in Russian – which he couldn't understand.

Prince, along with hundreds of Russians and a "handful" of Indians underwent training in physical fitness and first aid at the military camp. After 10 days, they were moved to another camp nearby where they were given arms training for 13 days – bodies sculpted for a life at sea being moulded to fire weapons.

They learned how to use AK-47s, rocket-propelled grenades, and M60 machine guns – far removed from what Prince thought he would be doing in Russia when he boarded the flight from India.

Confetti of flesh, bone

None of that weapons training would help him when the bullet hit him. Disoriented and grappling for consciousness, he willed his body to move. He dug his elbows into the grime-caked earth, clawing his way back to a nearby trench.

Ten days in hospital

On February 7, Prince woke to the sterile confines of a hospital room. Doctors, their faces etched with haunted concern, extracted a bullet lodged in his skull. A bullet he had carried, unknowingly, through his harrowing escape.

In all, he spent 10 days in five hospitals, starting in Luhansk and ending in Rostov. Finally, he was released and ordered to return to Luhansk for his commander's signature on his injury leave request.

Prince, defying orders to remain at his camp in Luhansk, returned to Moscow. He fabricated a story about visiting relatives in Moscow for a day and, remarkably, secured permission. Prince sought refuge in a church, where he met with a priest and pleaded for help.

The church helped him contact the Indian embassy and his family back home in India.

Left in the lurch

Rafeek Ravuther, executive director of the Kerala-based Centre for Indian Migrant Studies, said most Indian migrants are duped by agents who promise them permanent residency in Europe.

Yet, despite this crisis, Ravuther said, political parties aren't referring to these overseas job scams at all in their election manifestos. India votes in the world's largest election over seven phases starting April 19. Kerala votes in the second phase on April 26.

Prince is now working with the Indian government to try and secure the release of Vineeth and Tinu, his cousins who are still believed to be in Ukraine, fighting for Russia. That, he said, is his most pressing concern.

Beyond that too, the future hangs uncertain. Prince needs to repay the loans he had taken out to pay the recruiter. Only when the lingering pain on the left side of his body subsides can he dream of returning to the life he once lived – the rhythmic call of the sea and the freedom of fishing.

Yet, beyond the storm in his head lies the familiar embrace of his village and the love of his family.

—Aljazeera

PHOTO: X@LIVENEWSPAKCOM

3 children killed in landmine blast in Khyber province

PESHAWAR, 13 APRIL

At least three children were killed on the spot and one injured in a landmine explosion in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Friday, police said. The tragic incident occurred in Wanna town of the tribal South Waziristan district on the third day of Eid. The children were on their way to watch a volleyball match between two local teams in the Mandokai area when one of them stepped on a landmine triggering a huge blast, a district police officer said. Three children died on the spot and one was critically injured. The injured child was provided immediate treatment at a local hospital before being shifted to a district hospital in Dera Ismail Khan. It was not immediately clear who planted the landmines in the area. *—PTI*

First European citizen jailed under HK security law

LONDON, 13 APRIL

A Portuguese man has become the first European citizen jailed under the China-imposed National Security Law in Hong Kong, a law widely criticised by rights groups. Joseph John, also known as Wong Kin-chung, holds a Portuguese passport and Hong Kong residency and was previously based in the UK. He was arrested for posting pro-independence and anti-China content on social media, after returning to Hong Kong to visit family in 2022 In February, he was convicted of "secession" and on Thursday sentenced to five years in jail. Under the law, secession is the offence of advocating for Hong Kong to break away from China. John, 41, had previously been the head of a little-known group calling itself the Hong Kong Independence Party, where he operated the group's Facebook and other social media accounts as well as a UK-registered website. The group advocated for foreign intervention in China's rule over Hong Kong following the 2019 pro-democracy protests. *—BBC News*

New UN Dy officer for Middle East Peace process

NEW YORK, 13 APRIL

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres announced today the appointment of Muhannad Hadi of Jordan as his new Deputy Special Coordinator and Resident Coordinator, Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. In a statement issued by his Office, Guterres said that Hadi will also serve as Humanitarian Coordinator. He succeeds James Eugene McGoldrick of Ireland, to whom the Secretary-General is grateful for his dedication and service. Having served since 2020 as the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, Hadi brings more than 30 years of extensive international experience in humanitarian affairs and development work. *—ANI*

Nepal celebrates New Year's Day as per Bikram era

KATHMANDU, 13 APRIL

Nepal on Saturday celebrated New Year's Day according to the traditional Bikram Sambat 2081 calendar with much fanfare, with tourists and pilgrims thronging scenic spots and temples in the Himalayan nation. The Bikram era or Sambat is named after Indian King Bikramaditya and this is the official calendar in Nepal. On Saturday, the first day of Baisakh as per the Nepalese calendar, people are celebrating New Year's Day with fanfare across the country. To celebrate the Nepalese New Year, people clean their houses, prepare delicious cuisine and visit temples to celebrate. *—PTI*

Joe Biden warns Iran against attacking Israel

Israel Defence Minister said they are ready to defend themselves

WASHINGTON, 13 APRIL

.US President Joe Biden says he expects Iran to attack Israel "sooner than later", as fears grow of Iranian retaliation over an air strike that killed top commanders early this month.

Israel has not admitted attacking an Iranian consulate in Syria but is widely believed to have been behind it. US officials have told CBS News, that a major attack on Israel could happen imminently. Israel says it is ready to defend itself. Biden told Iran : "Don't." "We are devoted to the defence of Israel. We will support Israel," Biden said. "We will help defend Israel and Iran will not succeed."

Iran backs Hamas, the Palestinian group fighting Israel in Gaza, as well as various proxy groups throughout the region, including some - such as Hezbollah in Lebanon - that frequently carry out strikes against the Israelis.

On Friday, Hezbollah said it had launched "dozens" of rockets from Lebanon towards Israel. An Israel Defense Forces spokesman said around 40 missiles and two explosive drones had been launched. No casualties were reported and there were no indications of involvement from other actors. A US official told CBS the barrage was separate from any expected Iranian attack on Israel.

BBC Security Correspondent Frank Gardner says Iran is deliberately keeping the Middle East and Washington

US President Joe Biden *PHOTO: PTI*

guessing. Ever since the lethal 1 April strike on the consulate building in Damascus, from which Israel believes Iran was directing its covert arms supplies to Iranian proxies in Lebanon and Syria, Iran's security establishment has been debating its response.

This is all about calibration. Hit too hard and Israel will respond with devastating force. Go too lightly and Iran will risk being seen as weak and ineffective. From a tactical perspective, it makes no sense for Iran to respond right now, when the region is on full alert and when the US has been telling the world what to expect.

The US state department also barred diplomatic staff and their families in Israel from travelling outside the cities of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Beersheba.

—BBC News

Hezbollah fires 'dozens of rockets' at Israel

BEIRUT, 13 APRIL

Hezbollah said it has fired "dozens of rockets" at Israeli artillery positions in response to the Israeli military's strikes in southern Lebanon, in one of its largest assaults since the start of the war on Gaza.

The Iran-aligned armed Lebanese group confirmed in a statement late on Friday that it launched dozens of Katyusha rockets at "enemy artillery positions" in northern Israel and the occupied Golan Heights. The rockets triggered sirens in multiple communities across Upper Galilee in northern Israel, with air defence missiles engaging the incoming projectiles.

The Israeli military said "40 launches were identified from Lebanese territory, some of which were intercepted. The rest fell in open areas." "This is a large number of rockets and drones, one of the biggest barrages of the war so far in Gaza," said Al Jazeera's Rory Challands, reporting from occupied East Jerusalem.

"No injuries were reported," the Israeli military said, adding that it had earlier intercepted two explosive-laden drones operated by Hezbollah that had crossed from Lebanon into Israeli territory late on Friday. Hezbollah, an ally of the Palestinian group Hamas, and Israeli forces have been exchanging near-daily fire across the border since the war in Gaza started on 7 October.

While the tit-for-tat attacks have largely remained confined to border regions their frequency and intensity have raised fears of a wider conflict. *—Al Jazeera*

Militants kill 11 in Pak's Balochistan in latest terror attacks

KARACHI, 13 APRIL

At least 11 people, nine of them from Punjab province, were shot dead by militants in Pakistan's restive Balochistan in two separate incidents, authorities said on Saturday, as the region witnessed a surge in terror attacks in recent days.

Nine of the deceased were travelling in a bus on the National Highway from Quetta to Taftan when they were stopped by unknown militants, who pulled them out of the bus and killed them later, an official said. "The bodies of these nine men were later found with bullet wounds in the nearby mountainous areas near a bridge," he said.

"The bus was going from Quetta to Taftan when armed men stopped it and after identifying passengers took the nine men to the mountainous areas," he added.

In a separate incident, a car was fired upon on the same highway in which two passengers were killed and two others injured. Condemning the attacks, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif sought a report of the incident from authorities.

He also expressed condolences over the deaths and said that the terrorists and their facilitators will be brought to justice. Balochistan's Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti said that the terrorists involved in the killing of the 11 people on the Noshki highway would not be forgiven and hunted down soon.

Bugti that the terrorists involved in the attacks would be chased, adding that they aimed to sabotage the peace of Balochistan. *—PTI*

Iran seizes cargo in Strait of Hormuz

DUBAI, 13 APRIL

A video seen by The Associated Press shows commandos raiding a ship near the Strait of Hormuz by helicopter on Saturday, an attack a Mideast defense official attributed to Iran amid wider tensions between Tehran and the West.

The video showed the attack earlier reported by the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations. It had offered no details about the boarding in the Gulf of Oman off the Emirati port city of Fujairah. The defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters, shared the video with the AP. In it, the commandos rappelled down onto a stack of containers sitting on the deck of the vessel.

A crew member on the ship could be heard saying: "Don't come out." He then tells his colleagues to go to the ship's bridge as more commandos come down on the deck. One commando can be seen kneeling above the others to provide them potential cover fire. Though the AP could not immediately verify the video, it corresponded to known details of the boarding, and the helicopter involved appeared to be one used by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, which has carried out other ship raids in the past.

Video shows raid on ship near Strait of Hormuz that a Mideast official says was carried out by Iran *PHOTO: X@ARMINAREFI*

The vessel involved is likely the Portuguese-flagged MSC Aries, a container ship associated with London-based Zodiac Maritime. Zodiac Maritime is part of Israeli billionaire Eyal Ofer's Zodiac Group. Neither MSC nor Zodiac immediately responded to a request for comment.

The MSC Aries had been last located off Dubai heading toward the Strait of Hormuz on Friday. The ship had turned off its tracking data, which has been common for Israeli-affiliated ships moving through the region.

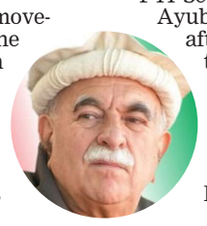
The incident comes amid heightened tensions between Iran and the West, particularly after a suspected Israeli strike on the Iranian Consulate in Syria. Meanwhile, the wider Middle East remains on edge after six months of Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. *—AP*

Pakistan Oppn alliance to launch countrywide drive

ISLAMABAD, 13 APRIL

Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's party under the umbrella of a "grand opposition alliance" on Saturday announced a countrywide movement against the alleged rigging in the February 8 election and the government established by tampering of the mandate.

The launch of the movement indicates that the dream of post-election peace and political stability will be wilting sooner than expected. The six-party alliance that includes Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, in a late-night meeting that continued till the early hours of Saturday decided to come together under the banner of Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan (TTAP), a movement to protect the Constitution of Pakistan.



Mehmood Achakzai, President of Oppn alliance

Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party chairman Mehmood Khan Achakzai was nominated as president of the alliance at the hours-long meeting, which was presided over by Balochistan National Party-Mengal chief Sardar Akhtar Mengal. Sunni Ittehad Council chairman Sahibzada Hamid Raza Khan, Majlis Wahdat Muslimeen Chairman Raja Nasir Abbas and Jamaat-i-Islami leader Liaquat Baloch also attended the meeting.

PTI Secretary General Omar Ayub Khan told the media after the meeting that the movement aimed to restore the rule of law in the country and it would be launched with a public rally from the Pishin area of Balochistan from Saturday. "All political parties have joined the opposition alliance of their own will in view of the deteriorating situation in all fields," he said. Omer said that the movement was being launched against alleged massive rigging in the February 8 elections, as the alliance rejected the 'government' established by tampering with the election result. *—PTI*

6 killed in Sydney shopping center stabbing incident

SYDNEY, 13 APRIL

A man began stabbing people at a busy Sydney shopping center Saturday before he was fatally shot, leaving multiple people including a small child injured, police said.

The suspect attacked nine people at the Westfield Shopping Centre in Bondi Junction, which is in the city's eastern suburbs, before a police inspector shot him after he turned and raised a knife, Assistant Police Commissioner Anthony Cooke told reporters. Five of the victims and the suspect died, he said. He had no details on the condition of the injured. Cooke said he believed that the suspect acted alone, and he was "content that there is no continuing threat." He said officials didn't know who the offender was. "This is quite raw," he said, and a "lengthy and precise" investigation was just beginning.

He said there was "nothing that we are aware of at the scene that would indicate any motive or any ideology." When asked whether officials were ruling out terrorism, he said: "We're not ruling anything out." Cooke said the police inspector, a senior officer, was alone when she confronted the suspect and engaged him soon after her arrival on the scene, "saving a range of people's lives."

Video showed many ambulances and police cars around the shopping center, and people streaming out. Paramedics were treating patients at the scene. Witness Roi Huberman, a sound engineer at ABC TV in Australia, told the network that he sheltered in a store during the incident. *—AP*

A crowd gathers outside Westfield Shopping Centre after the attack in Sydney, Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

PHOTO: X@AVGASIANJOE248

HAITI TO CHOOSE NEW LEADERS AS VIOLENCE RAGES

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 13 APRIL

Haiti has formally established a transitional council to fill a leadership vacuum by choosing a new prime minister, and to restore order in the Caribbean country ravaged by gang violence.

A decree published in the official gazette announced the formation of the Presidential Transitional Council on Friday, a month after Prime Minister Ariel Henry said he would step down amid a wave of attacks by armed gangs in the capital, Port-au-Prince.

There was no immediate comment from Henry following the publication of the decree and questions remain about the nine-member council's viability with no details on a timeframe to install the body and select a new prime minister and cabinet.

The decree also did not name the members of the council, the Reuters news agency reported. It said Henry and the council will govern the country until the new body names his replacement.

The Caribbean Community and Common Market, a regional bloc, said in a statement that the council's mission "is to put Haiti back on the road to dignity, democratic legitimacy, stability and sovereignty and to ensure the proper functioning of the State's institutions". *—Al Jazeera*

DEEPENS US, JAPAN TIES

Philippines treads fine line with China

MANILA, 13 APRIL

Against a backdrop of rising tension in the South China Sea between Beijing and Manila, the leaders of Japan, Philippines and the United States have forged an unprecedented level of cooperation to counter China.

But while US President Joe Biden and Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida have stressed the security aspects of their cooperation, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr has highlighted its potential economic rewards, touting the partnership with promised investments of some $100bn as a friendship with benefits.

At the televised opening of the summit on April 11, Biden told the other two leaders: "I want to be clear. The United States' defence commitments to Japan and the Philippines are ironclad. Any attack on Philippine aircraft, vessels or armed forces in the South China Sea will invoke our Mutual Defence Treaty."

Philippines Treads Softly After Landmark Ruling *PHOTO: X@SULAIMANADENEKA*

Only afterwards did Biden discuss how the US government would help the Philippines develop key economic areas such as its semiconductor supply chain, and telecommunications and critical infrastructure including ports, railways and agriculture. In Manila, though, the Presidential Communications Office downplayed the security aspect of the concluded summit, which had expressed "serious concerns about the People's Republic of China's (PRC) dangerous and aggressive behaviour in the South China Sea".

Semiconductor push

Ravelas argues that Marcos Jr, like previous presidents, is keen to turn the country into a manufacturing and logistics hub. "We are geographically located to be part of the supply chain in ASEAN," being within only three hours by air from regional countries Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia, he noted. The summit announced the formation of the first-ever Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment corridor in the Asia Pacific, called the Luzon Economic Corridor. It will connect Manila to three sprawling areas in the country's biggest island, Luzon, which can host manufacturers and other large business ventures: the US's former Subic naval base, the former Clark airbase and Batangas province. *—Al Jazeera*

'Remove drinks, beverages from health drinks list'

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

The government has asked all the e-commerce companies to remove drinks and beverages, including Bournvita, from the health drinks category from their portals. The order is dated 10 April, 2024. It said that all e-commerce companies/portals are advised to remove drinks and beverages, including Bournvita, from the category of health drinks from their platforms/sites. On 2 April, food safety standards regulator FSSAI directed all e-commerce food business operators (FBOs) to ensure appropriate categorisation of food products being sold on their websites. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has noted that instances of food products licensed under 'Proprietary Food' with the nearest category Dairy-Based Beverage Mix or Cereal-Based Beverage Mix or Malt-Based Beverage being sold on e-commerce websites under the category Health Drink, Energy Drink, etc, it added. *—PTI*

All 224 flats in Gurugram project sold for ₹440crore

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

Realty firm Ashiana Housing on Saturday said it sold 224 luxury flats in Gurugram for Rs 440 crore within 15 minutes of its launch. The project is located at Sector 93 in Gurugram, Haryana. In a statement, the company said it has "sold out the entire phase 3 of its prestigious project, Ashiana Amarah within 15 minutes of launch". "We are very happy with the incredible response to Ashiana Amarah phase 3 launch. We started registration at 11 am and we had received 800 cheques for 224 units by 11.15. In 15 minutes it was oversubscribed four times," Ashiana Housing Joint Managing Director Ankur Gupta said. He attributed the oversubscription to the company's brand value and execution track record. *—PTI*

Delhi airport sees 22 flight diversions due to bad weather

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

As many as 22 flights were diverted at the Delhi airport on Saturday evening due to bad weather, according to an official. Of them, 9 flights were diverted to Jaipur, 8 to Lucknow, 2 to Chandigarh, and 1 each to Varansi, Amritsar and Ahmedabad. The official said 9 flights of IndiGo, 8 flights of Air India, and 3 flights of Vistara were among those that were diverted. The flights were diverted between 1500 hours and 1830 hours, the official added. The Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) in the national capital handles around 1,300 flight movements daily. *—PTI*

HMPL board approves ₹486cr fundraising plan

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

Infrastructure company Hazoor Multi Projects Ltd (HMPL) on Saturday said its board has approved a proposal to raise Rs 486 crore through the issuance of warrants. The plan was approved by the board of the company at a meeting on Friday, HMPL said in a regulatory filing. The board has approved fundraising of Rs 4,860 million through issuing and allotting up to 1.62 crore fully convertible warrants to the persons belonging to the 'non-promoter' and 'public' category on a preferential basis at an issue price of Rs 300 per warrant, the company said. The proposal is subject to the approval of shareholders and other regulatory authorities, HMPL added. "Upon issue of Warrants in accordance herewith, an amount equivalent to 25 per cent of the total issue size shall be called upfront from the proposed allottees," it noted. The company said it looks to utilise the proceeds to enhance financial resources to fund its growth. Besides, the constitution of a fundraising raising committee was among the several proposals approved by the board. *—PTI*

Govt asks gas plants to be operational

IMD predicts above-normal max temperature

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

COMBATTING SUMMER

According to IMD, the most prone areas to an increased heatwave are Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra PHOTO: PTI

In a bid to tackle the high demand for electricity during the summer months, the government has taken proactive measures to operationalize gas-based power plants across the country.

According to the Ministry of Power, the government has issued directives to all Gas-Based Generating Stations (GBSs) to ensure maximum power generation, thus optimising the utilization of these facilities. This move comes in response to a significant portion of GBSs remaining underutilized due to commercial considerations.

The release highlights that Union Minister for Power and New & Renewable Energy RK Singh, chaired a series of meetings, emphasizing the imperative of adequate power availability to meet the heightened load during the hot weather.

According to the press release, the step taken by the government aims to bolster the availability of power from gas-based facilities during the impending high-demand period effective from 1 May, 2024, to 30 June, 2024.

The release further added that the GBSs holding Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) with Distribution Licensees will prioritize offering their power to PPA holders. Any surplus power not absorbed by PPA holders will be directed to the power market for distribution. Gas-based generating stations without PPAs are mandated to offer their generation in the power market. The government has also constituted a high-level committee to headed by the Chairperson of Central Electricity Authority to implement the order.

- It added that the GBSs holding Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) with Distribution Licensees will prioritize offering their power to PPA holders

India's electricity demand has been rising rapidly, driven by economic growth, particularly during hot weather and high-demand periods. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has also predicted above-normal maximum temperatures over most parts of the country during the 2024 hot weather season.

According to IMD, the most prone areas to an increased heatwave are Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and North Karnataka followed by Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and north Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh.

Heatwave is a condition of air temperature that becomes fatal to the human body when exposed. It is defined based on the temperature thresholds over a region in terms of actual temperature or its departure from normal temperature. *—ANI*

REVISING MEASURES

Govt eases payment mode for Myanmar pulse imports

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

PHOTO: PTI

The government on Saturday said the payment mechanism for traders importing pulses from Myanmar has been eased and simplified. The importers have been asked to utilize Rupee/ Kyat direct payment system using Special Rupee Vostro Account (SRVA) through Punjab National Bank, the consumer affairs ministry said in a statement.

India depends on imports of pulses to meet the domestic shortage. The country imports tur and urad dals from Myanmar. Consumer Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare discussed with Indian Mission in Yangon issues relating to pulses imports from Myanmar such as import prices in the wake of revised exchange rates and stocks held by importers in Myanmar, it said.

The Ministry said that the Indian Mission informed the secretary that the Rupee/Kyat Settlement Mechanism has been operationalised from 25 January this year to simplify trade transactions and to make them more efficient. The Central Bank of Myanmar released guidelines for payment procedures under SRVA on 25 January, 2024.

"Adoption of the mechanism by traders will reduce costs associated with currency conversions and eliminate complexities related to exchange rates by eliminating the need for multiple currency conversations," the ministry statement said.

- The Ministry said that the Indian Mission informed the secretary that the Rupee/Kyat Settlement Mechanism has been operationalised from 25 January this year to simplify trade transactions

It said "dissemination about the operationalization of this mechanism among trading communities especially pulses importers is being separately done wherein they are being requested to utilize Rupee/ Kyat direct payment system using SRVA through Punjab National Bank." *—PTI*

GOVT TO START PORTAL TO MONITOR PULSES STOCK

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

Government is going to start an online portal from 15 April to monitor the availability of the stock of pulses.

According to Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, the importers and traders of pulses have been instructed to accurately declare their stocks of pulses, including imported Yellow Peas, every week.

Secretary of the Department of Consumer Affairs, Nidhi Khare, conducted a series of meetings with stakeholders in the pulse industry to review the availability of pulses and discuss import-related issues.

During the meeting, discussion was also held on inputs from market intelligence sources regarding the stock position held by various market players. The government ensures that strict action will be taken against the forward trading of pulses.This states that during the meeting issues regarding pulses imports from Myanmar were also discussed. The Indian Mission informed about the operationalization of the Rupee Kyat Settlement Mechanism, which aims to streamline trade transactions and enhance efficiency.

Traders are encouraged to utilize the Rupee/Kyat direct payment system through the Special Rupee Vostro Account (SRVA) via Punjab National Bank, thereby reducing costs associated with currency conversions and eliminating complexities. *—ANI*

Investments in real estate declined 55% annually

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

PHOTO: PTI

Institutional investments in real estate declined 55 per cent annually in January-March this year to USD 552 million as cautious foreign investors stayed away, pumping in only USD 11 mn, according to Vestian.

The real estate sector had attracted USD 1,238.3 million (USD 1.23 billion) in the January-March period of 2023 calendar year, as per the report, which was released on Saturday.

The latest data by global property consultant Vestian showed that the institutional inflow from foreign funds in the country's real estate plunged 99 per cent to just USD 11 million in the first quarter of 2024 from USD 791.4 million in the year-ago period.

Domestic investors pumped in USD 541.1 million in the Indian real estate in January-March 2025, up 21 per cent from 446.9 million in the year-ago period.

Vestian CEO Shrinivas Rao, said, "Domestic investors are bullish about India's growth story, and continue to pour in investments in the real estate sector. On the other hand, foreign investors are cautious due to global macroeconomic uncertainty and geopolitical tensions."

Commercial assets (office, retail, co-working, and hospitality projects) garnered the highest investments of USD 231.6 million in the March quarter, as against USD 484.8 million in the year-ago period.

Investments significantly decreased 73 per cent in the industrial and warehousing sector to USD 58.9 million in the January-March period from USD 215.8 million a year ago.

Bengaluru dominated the institutional investments during the quarter with USD 299 million, followed by Delhi-NCR at USD 110 million.

Both cities together accounted for around 74 per cent of the total investments received in the current quarter. *—PTI*

NEW INNOVATIONS

Meta tests AI-powered search bar in Instagram

CALIFORNIA, 13 APRIL

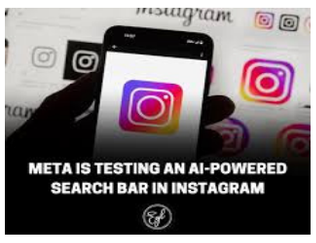


PHOTO: ANI

Meta is pushing ahead with its efforts to make its generative AI-powered products available to more users. Apart from testing Meta AI chatbot with users in countries like India on WhatsApp, the company is also experimenting with putting Meta AI in the Instagram search bar for both chat with AI and content discovery.

The search query in the search bar leads you to a conversation in DM with Meta AI, where you can ask questions or use one of the pre-loaded prompts. The design of the prompt screen prompted Perplexity AI's CEO, Aravind Srinivas, to point out that the interface uses a design similar to the startup's search screen.

"Our generative AI-powered experiences are under development in varying phases, and we're testing a range of them publicly in a limited capacity," a Meta spokesperson told TechCrunch.

Also, Meta would want Instagram to have better discoverability than TikTok. Last year, Google introduced a new perspectives feature to surface results from Reddit and TikTok. Earlier this week, reverse engineer Alessandro Paluzzi noted on X that Instagram is working on an option called "Visibility off Instagram" to possibly show posts as part of search engine results. *—TechCrunch*

- The search query in the search bar leads you to a conversation in DM with Meta AI, where you can ask questions or use one of the pre-loaded prompts. Also, Meta would want Instagram to have better discoverability than TikTok

X premium users can no longer hide blue checks

CALIFORNIA, 13 APRIL

PHOTO: ANI

Last year, Elon Musk's X rolled out a feature for paid users to hide their blue checkmarks from others after the checks became primarily a paid feature. Now, the company is making another U-turn: It's sending notifications to users warning that the feature will go away soon.

As with other decisions taken by X, there is no definite timeline as to when the switch will happen. More definite is that the move will add one more layer of confusion around what the blue checkmark actually means these days, since it is arriving swiftly on the heels of yet one more change: X expanding blue-check status to more non-paying users based on how many "blue check" followers they have themselves.

Last week, the company removed a section in its X Premium support page that described how paying users could hide their checkmarks. This week, it began to send notifications to Premium users spelling things out a bit more.

The company more widely continues to grapple with major trust and safety issues on the platform — not just impersonators but misinformation, harassment and other abusive content. When Elon changed the blue checkmark feature into a revenue driver, he undermined the point of it in trying to combat some of those issues.

X has made a number of other moves that have confused what blue checkmarks actually mean when you see them on the site. *—TechCrunch*

- Last week, the company removed a section in its X Premium support page that described how paying users could hide their checkmarks. This week, it began to send notifications to Premium users spelling things out a bit more

BY 3-4 TIMES

Builders expect sales to grow during festive season

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

In Delhi-NCR, home sales saw a YOY increase of 184% in Q1 2024 compared to Q1 2023. PHOTO: ANI

Real Estate developers are avoiding festival offers this season because of high demand and quick sale of projects. During COVID and the slowdown in the real estate period when there was an oversupply of inventories, builders used to give various incentives like free registration, TVs, ACs, cars and even foreign trips for booking/buying flats.

The situation has changed now, recently Godrej properties sold its Gurugram project "Gold Zenith" having 1050 flats worth Rs 3000 crore in just 3 days.

Similarly, In January 2014, DLF sold its 1,113 luxury apartments in Gurugram worth Rs 7200 crore within 3 days of its pre-launch offer.

In March last year, DLF sold its other project in Gurugram having 1,137 luxury apartments, priced at Rs 7 crore and above for over Rs 8,000 crore within three days.

Niranjan Hiranandani, Managing Director, Hiranandani group, said, "Housing demand has definitely picked up and during festival, sales grew by 3-4 times, "It is an auspicious time, and many sources get recorded, documented and closed during this timeThe number of sales we close at these good times, at least 3 times or four times more is expected as compared to the rest of the year."

- In India, consumers prefer making big-ticket purchases during festive seasons, as it is considered auspicious. Sales of all kinds of things including cars, gold, and white goods soar during festivals, including those of real estate

With the onset of the festive seasons in April, industry experts say with certitude that home buyers and property investors will be gearing up to invest in residential as well as commercial real estate purchases. Director, of Orris Infrastructure, Amit Gupta, said "Chaitra Navratri particularly serves as a powerful motivator for investors to consider allocating funds towards commercial real estate assets. We expect a 20 per cent to 30 per cent increase in sales during this festive time."

In Delhi-NCR, home sales saw a YOY increase of 184 per cent in Q1 2024 compared to Q1 2023. With the onset of the festive seasons in April, industry experts say with certitude that home buyers and property investors will be gearing up to invest in residential as well as commercial real estate purchases. In India, consumers prefer making big-ticket purchases during festive seasons, as it is considered auspicious. Sales of all kinds of things including cars, gold, and white goods soar during festivals, including those of real estate. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

PETREGAZ INDIA COMMISSIONS LPG IMPORT

CHENNAI, 13 APRIL

Petregaz India, a subsidiary of Petredec Group has commissioned its new state-of-the-art LPG Import and Storage Terminal that has been set up at an outlay of Rs 600 crore, the company said on Saturday.

The new facility located within the Adani Krishnapatnam Private Port at Krishnapatnam in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh would benefit private marketers as well as residential, commercial, industrial, and automotive consumers.

The newly commissioned facility, with an investment of Rs 600 crore, enables Petregaz to deliver cost-effective, and dependable solutions to LPG marketers, the company said in a statement.With an annual capacity of over 1.5 million metric tonnes, the facility has excellent road connectivity to the hinterland of Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. The terminal also has two refrigerated storage tanks, a modern jetty with no congestion and capable of berthing all types of LPG vessels. *—PTI*

Bihar, UP takes lead in new investor registration at NSE

MUMBAI, 13 APRIL

With the Indian stock market at an all-time high, the recent data from the National Stock Exchange (NSE) reveals that states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh have outnumbered the states like Gujarat and Maharashtra in adding new investors.

Traditionally the NSE was dominated by investors from Gujarat, Maharashtra but the recent statistics from the NSE indicate a remarkable shift.

The NSE data reveals that since October last year over 42 per cent of new investors are hailing from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and other North Indian states.

The data further highlights that over 3.1 crore investors from Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and other Northern states have been added to the NSE since October last year. While during the same time, Maharashtra, Gujarat and other western states added only 2.8 crore investors.

Notably, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have witnessed exponential growth in their investor base since fiscal year 2020.

This is the first time in the NSE history that marked a shift as the investors from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have outnumbered the Maharashtra and Gujarat in adding new investors to the NSE.

According to the NSE, positive trends in the Indian stock market and rapid digitization in the past 8 years have supported the increase in investors. This trend has led to the entry of investors from newer regions of India. Furthermore, the number of new investors from the northeastern states has demonstrated even more remarkable growth rates.

The report further highlights that the number of investors in the NSE has seen a continuous rise since the pandemic. *—ANI*

NSE was dominated by investors from Gujarat, Maharashtra but the recent statistics from the NSE indicate a remarkable shift PHOTO: ANI

PHOTO: X@ROLEXMCMASTERS

Tsitsipas beats Sinner to reach Monte Carlo Final

MONACO, 13 APRIL

Stefanos Tsitsipas stayed on course for a third Monte Carlo Masters title after beating a tiring Jannik Sinner 6-4, 3-6, 6-4 in the semifinals on Saturday, handing the Australian Open champion only his second defeat of the season. The 12th-seeded Greek plays the winner of a later semifinal No 8 Casper Ruud, a two-time French Open runner-up. Sinner, who already has three titles this year, looked in control in the deciding set when he led 4-3 with a service game to follow. But he called for a medical timeout during the changeover and a trainer massaged his right knee and thigh. *—AP*

Namdhari FC rattle Real Kashmir FC to record big win

SRINAGAR, 13 APRIL

Debutants Namdhari FC finished in the ninth position in the I-League 2023-24 as they inflicted a humiliating 4-1 defeat on Real Kashmir FC at the TRC Football Turf on Saturday. Namdhari FC thus ended their campaign with 27 points from 24 matches. They won seven matches, drew six and lost the rest. The winners led 2-0 at half-time after goals from Stephen Acquah (20') and Imanol Arana Sadaba (24' penalty). The defeat against Namdhari was their second in a row, the previous being against the relegated TRAU FC in Kalyani. Playing in front of a good turnout, the home side found themselves at the receiving end early in the match as two goals by the visitors within 24 minutes completely upset their game plan. *—PTI*

Gaurav Gill finishes Day 1 of Otago Rally in top-three

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

India's fastest rally driver Gaurav Gill of JK Tyre put himself in contention for a podium finish after grabbing a top-three place at the end of the opening day of Otago Rally in New Zealand. Gill and his New-Zealand-based co-driver Jared Hudson were third on the timesheets, a little over 30 seconds behind overall leader Jack Hawkeswood and 11 seconds adrift of second-placed Robbie Stokes. Gill and Hudson were piloting 2022 APRC champion and 10-time Otago Rally winner Haydon Paddon's Hyundai i20 N Rally2 machine. The Otago Rally is amongst the most historic racing events in the world and has been held every year since 1976. This year, the rally has drawn a field of 117 cars, the largest in four years. *—PTI*

India to remain in Group 1 after 2-1 defeat to NZ

CHANGSHA, 13 APRIL

Indian women's team concluded its challenge at the Billie Jean King Cup 2024 Asia/Oceania Group 1 with a 2-1 loss to New Zealand in Changsha, China on Saturday. With this loss, India has finished third in their group with three wins and two losses. The top two sides, China and South Korea earned a promotion to the play-offs while India is still in Group 1 along with New Zealand. Rutuja Bhosale gave India an early advantage as she secured win in her singles match but Ankita Raina brought down the momentum with a straight-set loss in her game. Raina and Prarthana Thombare also lost in their tie-deciding doubles rubber. *—ANI*

Dhoni in spotlight as CSK, MI resume rivalry

Dhoni will play for 1st time ever as a non-captain

MUMBAI, 13 APRIL

The legendary Mahendra Singh Dhoni will be in the spotlight in what could be his final game at the iconic Wankhede Stadium when defending champions Chennai Super Kings take on Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League on Sunday.

Dhoni returns to the hallowed turf of Wankhede for the first time ever as a non-captain of the CSK, potentially in his last IPL season. It will also be his first appearance as just a player for any team since November 2005.

Even at 42, Dhoni's glovework remains impeccable and so does his assessment of the game like always. But CSK will hope that his tactical acumen also helps them improve a dismal away record this season, having suffered two defeats on the road.

MI's Tilak Verma, CSK's Jadeja adn Rahane pose for a group picture ahead of the match PHOTO: X@CHENNAIIPL

CSK would also hope their recent record against MI — four wins in last five matches including their seven-wicket win here last season — holds them in good stead.

Two of IPL's most successful teams with five titles each, both sides are witnessing a tectonic shift of leadership change with Hardik Pandya taking over the mantle from Rohit Sharma at MI and Ruturaj Gaikwad succeeding Dhoni at CSK, but there is nothing that suggests their intense rivalry would expect any such shift. *—PTI*

KKR vs LSG: Gambhir backs Mitch Starc

Gambhir said team success is important

KOLKATA, 13 APRIL

Mitchell Starc's poor returns with the ball this IPL "does not make him a bad bowler", Kolkata Knight Riders mentor Gautam Gambhir said on Saturday while laying emphasis on the team's success over individual brilliance.

The Australian left-arm quick, who was bought by the franchise for a whopping sum of Rs 24.75 crore, has so far taken just two wickets at an average of 77 and has leaked 11 runs per over across four matches.

But Starc found support from KKR mentor Gambhir, who said:

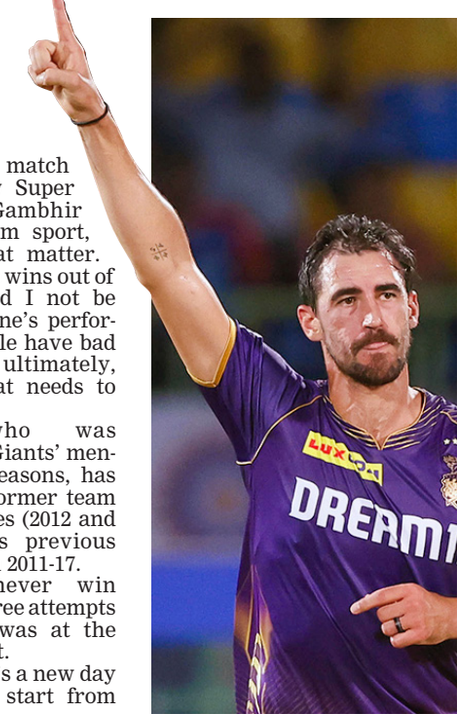
"It (his poor stats) doesn't matter, T20 cricket is all about bowlers getting smashed. We've got three wins out of four."

Ahead of their match against Lucknow Super Giants here, Gambhir added, "In a team sport, it's the wins that matter. We have got three wins out of four. Why should I not be happy with anyone's performance? See, people have bad and good days, ultimately, it's the team that needs to win.

Gambhir, who was Lucknow Super Giants' mentor in last two seasons, has returned to his former team that won two titles (2012 and 2014) during his previous stint at KKR from 2011-17.

KKR could never win against LSG in three attempts while Gambhir was at the opposition dugout.

Gambhir said it's a new day and they would start from scratch. *—PTI*



Mitchell Starc PHOTO: ANI

'Ponting advised me to focus on timing the ball'

LUCKNOW, 13 APRIL

Delhi Capitals young batting sensation Jake Fraser-McGurk says if he could handle the nerves on his IPL debut, the credit goes to coach Ricky Ponting, who advised him to time the ball instead of swinging his bat wildly. Fraser-McGurk, who holds the record for the fastest List A century in 29 balls, seized the opportunity with both hands, smashing a 35-ball 55 to set up their six-wicket win that helped move up from the bottom of the standings. Having gone unsold at the auction, the young Aussie top-order batter, who has two ODI appearances, was signed at his base price of Rs 50 lakh as a replacement for Lungi Ngidi. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

TODAY'S MATCH

KKR vs LSG	MI vs CSK
Time: 3.30 pm	**Time**: 7.30 pm
Where To Watch: Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network	**Where To Watch**: Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network
Stadium: Eden Gardens, Kolkata	**Stadium**: Wankhede Stadium, Mumabi

EPL: Isak scores twice as Newcastle thump Spurs

LONDON, 13 APRIL

Alexander Isak's rich goalscoring form at St James' Park continued as Newcastle beat Tottenham to boost their hopes of European football next season.

Isak produced two clinical finishes to score in each half as he netted on home turf for the sixth consecutive match. The striker now has 17 goals in 24 Premier League appearances this season. Anthony Gordan and Fabian Schar were also on target for the Magpies, while Timo Werner had two chances for Spurs but his finishing let him down.

Newcastle's emphatic victory lifted them up to sixth in the table - a point ahead of Manchester United, who face Bournemouth at 17:30 BST on Saturday. Spurs dropped to fifth, below Aston Villa on goal difference.

From Alan Shearer and Andrew Cole to Malcolm Macdonald and Jackie Milburn, Newcastle's fans have long held a special affinity for a goalscoring striker. Isak may have the number 14 emblazoned on the back of his shirt, but the Sweden striker is cut from the same cloth as names typically associated with the fabled number nine.

In the Premier League era, only two men have scored in more successive games than Isak - Shearer (15) and Cole (eight) - to underline why he will quickly establish himself as a hero on Tyneside. The double he scored in this one-sided victory over Spurs underlined his finishing prowess as Newcastle left the visitors dazed in the spring sunshine.

Isak opened the scoring after he received the ball from Gordon, cut inside, then powerfully struck a low shot into corner of the net. The goal was the first scored since Newcastle introduced "sound shirts" which allow deaf fans to feel the noise of St James' Park.

Newcastle captain Dan Burn used sign language to say "love the fans" during the celebrations that followed Isak's strike. *—BBC News*

Anthony Gordon and Alexender Isak celbrates PHOTO: X/@NUFC

Indians still in hunt at Candidates Chess

TORONTO, 13 APRIL

Indian Grandmasters R Praggnanandhaa and D Gukesh would look to bridge the gap with leader Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia when they restart their campaigns in the eighth round of the Candidates chess tournament here.

Teen sensation Praggnanandhaa will be up against Frenchman Firouza Alireza, while Gukesh will take on compatriot Vidit Gujarathi when the tournament resumes on Saturday.

While all three Indians have had a decent outing in the open section so far, it is defending champion Nepomniachtchi who is in prime position to complete a hat-trick of titles at the halfway stage. With 4.5 points to his credit, Nepomniachtchi would be happy with his performance and stands as the favourite with half point more than nearest rivals Praggnanandhaa, Gukesh and top seed Fabiano Caruana of United States. Gujrathi on 3.5 points is known to rise towards the end of tournaments and one can expect him to come firing in the second half along with Hikaru Nakamura, who shares the fifth spot with him.

Alireza comes next in standings on the seventh spot with 2.5 points, a half point clear of Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan.

Indian Grandmasters R Praggnanandhaa and D Gukesh PHOTO: PTI

It has been a story of less hits and more misses for the Indian trio. Earlier in the event, Gujrathi had clearly outplayed Caruana and in the previous round too his position looked commanding against Abasov before settling for draws. Gukesh also enjoyed a great position against Alireza in the previous round and the Frenchman was under tremendous pressure with the clock ticking away too.

Gukesh will have black pieces against Gujrathi in a game that is likely to draw many eyeballs in the live telecast. *—PTI*

Amit Panghal won gold medal at the 2024 Strandja Memorial. PHOTO: PTI

Panghal returns to boxing for Olympic qualifiers

NEW DELHI, 13 APRIL

World Championships silver medallist Amit Panghal has returned to the Indian squad, which saw wholesale changes for the final Olympic qualifying event, set to be held in Bangkok from 25 May to 2 June. After Indian boxers' horrid run at the Olympic qualifiers in Italy last month, when not even one boxer could secure a quota, as many as five pugilists have lost their spot in the team for the second Qualification Tournament. The dismal show also led India's High Performanc Director Bernard Dunne to step down from his post. In the latest assessment, 2023 World Championships bronze medallist duo of Deepak Bhoria (51kg) and Mohammad Hussamudin (57kg), the six-time Asian Championships medallist Shiva Thapa (63.5kg), reigning national champion Lakshya Chahar (80kg) and 2022 Commonwealth games bronze medallist Jaisimine Lamboria (60kg) have lost their spot in the Indian team. *—PTI*

Indians entered the final game of the series after losing their previous four matches 1-5, 2-4, 1-2 and 1-3 PHOTO: X/@NUFC

5TH LOSS

Indian men's hockey team lose 2-3, suffer 0-5 series whitewash

PERTH, 13 APRIL

Indian men's hockey team failed to avoid a 0-5 series whitewash after going down 2-3 in the fifth Test against Australia, completing a nightmare of a tour on Saturday.

Indians entered the final game of the series after losing their previous four matches 1-5, 2-4, 1-2 and 1-3. The rubber was significant as far as preparation is concerned ahead of the upcoming Paris Olympics.

Skipper Harmanpreet Singh (4th) and Boby Singh Dhami (53rd) were the goal scorers for India, while Australia sounded the board through Jeremy Hayward (20th), Ky Willott (38th) and Tim Brand (39th).

Indians started the game with an attacking mindset. Jugraj Singh lobbed the ball up to Jarmanpreet Singh in the Aussie half but failed to connect with the forward line.

India took the lead in the fourth minute through Harmanpreet from a penalty corner as he registered his third goal of the series.

Australia equalised in the 20th minute through Hayward, who scored his seventh goal of the series from a set piece.

India's reserve custodian Suraj Karkera made a fine save to deny Nathan Ephraums.

Seconds from the half time, Australia secured a penalty corner but Suraj Karkera kept India in the hunt by making an excellent save with his right leg to deny Hayward.

India started brightly after the change of ends and secured a penalty in the 37th minute but Harmanpreet's flick missed the target.

The hosts too got two more penalty corners but the Indians defended well. *—PTI*